

A V.A.D. IN SALONIKA

BESSIE

MARCHANT



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V. A. D. in Salonika

By BESSIE MARCHANT

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"THE VLACII TOLD THE COLONEL THAT A TROOP OF MEN
HAD TAKEN THE RIDGE ROAD"

A V.A.D. in Salonika

A Tale of a Girl's Work
in the Great War

BY

BESSIE MARCHANT

Author of "The Gold-marked Charm"
"Lois in Charge" "A Girl
Munition Worker"
&c. &c.

Illustrated by John E. Sutcliffe

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Ι. ΜΕΓΑΣ

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A "V.A.D." IN SALONIKA

CHAPTER I

Joan's Find

It was a wild, windy morning in mid-July. Joan, coming out of the house by the garden door, looked doubtfully at the cloudy sky, wondering where she would spend the morning.

Amy and the boys had gone down to bathe. If it rained, they would be sure to take refuge on the pier. Joan loathed the pier, so she decided that she would have the morning to herself. In her present mood solitude would be very welcome, and as no one seemed to want her very much, of course no one would miss her. Instead of taking the road that led down to the town, she turned into the narrow path leading to the undercliff, making haste to hide herself in the thick growths of tamarisk and brambles, because she did not want to be followed.

She was out of joint with the world just now. That

is to say, she was not in sympathy with her surroundings. She was still wincing under the sting of her father's remarks last night when they were at dinner. Mr. Haysome was a self-made man. He had struggled up from a boyhood spent in poverty. He had worked hard, and denied himself many things: now, he was a wealthy man. But he had no pride, not even what Joan called proper pride. So far from being inclined to repress the fact of his lowly beginnings, he was forever bringing it forward, and expecting his children to do the same. Last night's trouble was because Joan had not been to see her Aunt Mary, who was Mrs. Mark Lewis, and who lived in a funny old house in the High Street, Swanton, which had been Mr. Haysome's old home. Mrs. Lewis let lodgings. Her queer old house was usually full from top to bottom. She had no time at all to visit her well-to-do kin, and they had to seek her if they wished to make her acquaintance.

It was really rather horrid that they had come to Swanton for three months, when they might so easily have gone somewhere else. Mr. Haysome had chosen to come. Mrs. Haysome was charmed with the house he had taken, which was called The Beacon, and stood right out on the headland, overlooking Swanton on one side, and Durling Bay on the other. Amy and the boys revelled in the bathing, the fishing, and the sands. Everyone was satisfied save Joan, who felt

Joan's Find

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herself out of things at every turn. It never occurred to her that she might be at all to blame in the matter. She thought herself the victim of circumstances, and very much to be pitied. As no one saw fit to pity her, she did it herself, and with the usual result.

There were seats in odd and unexpected places in the wilderness of the Durling undercliff. A truly charming spot it was, with beautiful views over the bay. But it was so dangerous that notices were posted here and there warning the public that they frequented the place at their own risk. Falls of rock were of frequent occurrence. Sometimes great masses of the cliff would slide bodily right into the sea, sometimes it would be just a shower of rocks, and great lumps of chalk dropping from above on to the thickets of tamarisk and blackberry brambles.

Joan heard the crashing of one of these cliff slides as she came down the narrow path from The Beacon. Her favourite seat was a bench under a hoary old pine growing half-way down the cliff. When she reached it this morning, she found that the slide had crashed right down on to the pine tree, and the bench was buried out of sight by masses of earth and rock.

"How horrid!" she cried in petulant fashion. She knew the undercliff pretty well by this time, and there was not another seat where she could have such a beautiful view of the sea, or be so really comfortable. She had meant to have such a very pleasant morning,

and had packed up a toothsome lunch so that she might not be driven back to the house by her hunger. Now, here at the very outset was disappointment. Oh, it was really vexing, and just on a par with all the rest of the things which ruffled the even surface of her way at the present time.

What was that? As Joan stood surveying the heap of rubbish and the piled masses of rock, she suddenly noticed a white canvas shoe sticking out of the heap of rubbish, and there was—oh, yes, there was a foot inside the shoe! Someone was lying there and being smothered in all that earth, crushed by the great boulders that had come hurtling down from above. Something she must do, but what?

If she ran for help she would be so long gone. The nearest house was The Beacon, but not much real help could come from there. Probably at this moment only the maids would be at home. Every minute was precious when human life was at stake. A something that was heroic stirred to life in the breast of Joan. Casting her mackintosh and umbrella on the ground, together with the bag that contained her book and the lunch that was so extra toothsome and dainty, she set to work to drag off the rocks and the uprooted shrubs, and shovel away the earth with her ungloved hands.

How she worked! So desperate was the need for haste that she could not even stop to shout for help. Five minutes of the hardest work she had ever done

in her life, and Joan had unearthed a man so far as the bottom of his waistcoat. A young sycamore tree brought down with the landslide had fallen so that it lay across the middle of his body. Try as she would Joan could not lift it or drag it round, for the branches were pinned down by rocks and rubbish. So she started at the other side of the tree, dragging away the rocks, scratching her hands with the long bramble trails. She was bruised and bleeding, but she did not even notice it, her one concern being to free the face of the man so that he could breathe. More rubbish, a great mass of uprooted flowers, a young tamarisk bush, and then, oh, joy! the face of the man partly covered by a grey cloth cap! The cap must really have saved his life, since but for it he would have been choked by the dust and earth that had come down upon him. He was alive, for he groaned as she dragged the cap from his face and tried to give him air. But when she spoke to him he did not answer, did not even seem conscious of her presence.

Again she tried to drag away the tree that was holding him down. It was hardly more than a sapling. She would not have been beaten by a slender thing like that, had not its wide-spreading branches been pinned down by the weight of the debris that had fallen upon them, making it impossible for her to move so much stuff without a shovel.

"Oh, whatever shall I do?" she cried, speaking aloud

in her trouble; and then it was the sound of her own voice that gave her inspiration. Rising to her feet, she began shouting for help at the very top of her voice. She could not leave the poor fellow, she could only hope that her cries would be heard by someone passing on the road at the top of the cliff; and, indeed, she was making noise enough to be heard a long way off. The trouble was that so few people frequented the undercliff at this part of the day, while the noise of the wind, and the dashing of the waves on the rocks below, drowned the sound of her voice.

She called until she was hoarse. Then she stooped over the injured man again. He was unconscious, and she thought there was a greyness on his haggard face that had not been there before. Was he dying because of that fearful pressure of the tree across his body? The fear of it made her leap to her feet to start afresh to tear away the rocks and dirt which held down the branches of the tree. Her hands were cut and bleeding; she was caked with dirt from head to foot, for a smart shower had fallen, although the rain was ceasing now.

"Help, help, help!" She had sprung to her feet and was calling again, putting intense urgency into her voice because of the desperate plight of the sufferer.

"Hallo!" Someone had answered at last. Joan, hearing the shout, took fresh heart, and called for help more urgently than before.

"Make haste, please. Oh, do make haste!" She was working away at the rocks again. Someone was coming, so she was free to go on doing her best to get the poor fellow clear from the weight of the tree.

"Hallo, Joan! I say, what is the matter?" A small boy of ten years or so came tearing down the winding path from the tamarisk tangle above, bursting upon her like a tornado.

"Lucas, is it you?" There was disappointment in Joan's tone. Her brother was too small to be of any real help; if it had been Tom, or even Fred, there would have been some hope of their being able to get the tree dragged away; the little boy, although willing, was not capable of doing much.

"Run back to the house, Lucas, run as fast as your feet can carry you, and bring someone to help me. Bring ever so many people, for this poor man will have to be carried up the cliff. Oh, and bring a shovel; but make haste, don't stop to ask questions. Run, run!"

Lucas stayed for no further bidding. He had seen the face of the man who was pinned down by the tree, and he was fairly scared. No need to urge him to haste; he was already scrambling up through the brambles by a short way. Five minutes would bring him to The Beacon, if his wind did not give out. Joan told herself that five minutes more would bring her help of some sort, so she took courage, and worked away as hard as

she could in loosening the soil about the head of the man. One arm was bent under him, the other was buried under the rubbish. He was really in a most terrible plight.

Would help never come? Surely Lucas must have lingered, or the maids must have stayed to change into outdoor things before coming to her help. Oh, how could they linger so when a man's life hung on their coming quickly to help lift him from under the tree? Joan was so spent she seemed to have scarcely strength to drag the loose boulders away, and her hands smarted so much that the pain brought tears to her eyes.

There was a sound of voices, then steps. A moment later Joan saw her father coming round the bend of the path, and following him two maids. These last were in caps and aprons, so they had come just as they were, and it was only her fancy that had made them seem to be so long in getting there.

"Pinned down is he, Joan? Poor fellow!" said Mr. Haysome, taking in the situation at a glance. "We will soon have him out of it, though. Here Julia, and you Selina, catch hold just here, and so, then lift, pull upwards with all your might. Steady, steady, a long, hard pull, not jerkiness; now all together!"

How they tugged! The two maids were strong and fresh for the work; they were used to exertion, and they bent to their task with a will. The young tree could not stand against so much strain.



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"A MOMENT LATER JOAN SAW HER FATHER COMING ROUND
THE BEND OF THE PATH"

Mr. Haysome was working too, though he was calling out directions to the others all the time. He was a big man, and strong. A long minute of heaving, and up came the tree. There was a breaking of branches, and a scattering of rocks and rubbish. Joan, crouching beside the victim, had to cover his face by bending down above it to save him from being hurt. She got one or two nasty bruises and scratches on her cheek, but she did not even feel them, and she helped her father lift the shoulders of the poor man, while the two maids cleared his feet of branches and brambles and all the other things which Joan had not been able to drag away.

"Is he badly hurt, Father?" Joan could not help her voice being rather shaky. She was very much ashamed of it, and she expected that her father would laugh at her, but he did not. Instead, he said very gravely:

"I am afraid he is. We shall have to carry him to the house, and send for the doctor. Lucas, cut away home as fast as you can go, and tell cook to have the bed in the blue room ready for the man. Then run back with a strong sheet, and one of the hammock chairs from the veranda. We shall have to carry him up the cliff in the sheet, but when we get there it will be a comfort to have a chair for the other part of the way."

Joan was so thankful that her father was there. Mr. Haysome was big and strong. He had a way too of

always deciding things for people, which was comforting in emergencies. Strong as he was though, and willing as the two maids were, it was a frightfully hard task to get the poor man up the cliff. Joan helped all she could, but she was worn from her toil in trying to free him from the rubbish and the tree that held him down.

"Father, we shall never do it; can't we get some more help from somewhere?" she panted, as she slipped and almost fell on the damp ground.

"Courage, Joan! We are nearly there. It needs a long pull, and a strong pull, and a pull all together. Now then, Julia, put out every bit of strength you have got; and you, Selina, lift when I say. Steady past those roots. Now lift, lift, lift!"

Joan gasped. How fearfully hard it was! That last dozen yards of upward climb seemed harder than all the rest put together. A mist came before her eyes, there was a roaring noise in her ears, and her father's voice, raised though it was, seemed to come from an immense distance.

"Take care, Miss Joan, take care!" It was Selina who called out the warning, and she was only just in time. Joan, in her blind struggle to lift as well as the others, was pressing close to the verge of a sheer drop on the cliff face; a really nasty fall she might have had, and it would have been something of a miracle if she had escaped with no broken bones.

"Mind what you are doing, Joan; we don't want

any more accidents!" said her father sharply; and because of the reproof in his voice Joan pulled herself together, and the last few yards of that dreadful journey were accomplished.

Lucas had the hammock chair spread flat on the ground. They laid the injured man on it, moving him as tenderly as possible, and then they straightened themselves for a brief two minutes of rest before starting to carry him along the easy path to the house. Lucas wanted to help, he fairly ached to do something; but he was too small to be of any use to the others, so his father sent him hurrying to fetch the doctor, and away pelted the boy, highly pleased at his errand. It was quite by accident that he had come back from the shore. He would have been down on the sands with his brothers and Amy, had he not left his new boat at home, and come back to fetch it. Then he had caught sight of a rabbit bolting down through the undergrowth, and in giving chase to it he had heard Joan calling for help, and had hurried to the rescue.

On his way down into Swanton he met his mother, who was coming back from a morning visit to the shops; and, pausing only to give her a startling account of what had happened, he pelted onward again, tremendously pleased with the exciting accident, which seemed to him a real adventure—just like one read about in books.

Mrs. Haysome reached the house almost as soon as those who were carrying the injured man. She called the cook to help the others upstairs with their burden, and then she sent Joan off out of the way, for it only needed one glance at the poor girl to see how spent she was, and how very near to break down.

"We can manage until the doctor comes; and, indeed, you are too dirty to come into a decent bedroom. Get your things off, dearie, and have a hot bath; it will take away some of the strain," she said kindly, as she took her daughter by the shoulders and gently but firmly turned her out of the room.

The first thing that Joan did when she reached the sanctuary of her own chamber was to sit down on the nearest chair and have a good cry, because, having had a chance to be really heroic, she had not risen to the occasion as she might have done. She looked such an awful sight, too. Catching a glimpse of herself in the mirror of her wardrobe, she was so horrified at the mud-plastered, ragged object she saw there, that her tears speedily dried while she gave sole attention to her toilet. She was so prim and precise in her ways that the others—that is, her sister and the boys—used to declare in fun that she had been born grown-up, and had never been a child at all. There was nearly four years between herself and Amy, a fact which had always set Joan apart from the rest of the family. But she was one by herself, not only in years, but in her tastes

and habits also. Indeed, she prided herself not a little on her refined and cultured tastes, and from the lofty pinnacle of her own superiority was very much inclined to look down upon the rest of her family.

The doctor came very quickly, but he was such a long time with the poor man, that Joan was dressed in fresh garments, and resting in a big chair on the veranda before he came downstairs. She had bound her hands to the best of her ability, and was feeling very languid and glad of a rest. The morning, which had been so unpromising at the first, was now gloriously fine, the sun shining down with July power and fervency.

"You will see my daughter's hands before you go, if you please, doctor," said Mrs. Haysome as she came down the stairs with the doctor.

Joan started up at this, her manner one of offended protest. "Indeed, Mother, there is no need; the hurts are quite trifling."

"All the same I might as well have a look at them," said the doctor cheerfully, and he advanced upon Joan with such a determined air that she gave way, and held her bandaged hands out for his inspection.

"Humph! Very well done," he said, surveying the bandages with a critical air. "Are you in training for a nurse? I should have thought that you were too young."

"I am too young," replied Joan resentfully, as it

she were finding fault with her own youth. "They will not let me train as a V.A.D. nurse yet, so I work in the kitchen of Lady Huntly's V.A.D. Hospital when I am at home. One does not have to be particular as to what the work is in these times."

The doctor laughed; then, as he attended to Joan's cuts, bruises, and scratches, he said thoughtfully: "It is one of the bright spots of these dark days that girls like you are waking up to see it is a woman's true vocation to be useful. By the way, there is a piece of useful work that you can do for me, if you will."

"I shall be delighted. Pray what is it?" cried Joan eagerly. This elderly, work-worn doctor had a way with him that was irresistible, and Joan felt that she would cheerfully go anywhere to serve him.

"That poor fellow upstairs is in great trouble about some papers that are lying about on his writing-table at the house where he is lodging. He asked me if I would go to his landlady and ask her to lock them up very carefully until he is well enough to look after them again. But I am urgently needed in another direction, and I should take it as a personal favour if you would go for me."

"I will go with pleasure. Where is he staying?" Joan was all animation and brightness now. Her hands might hurt her, and she might be tired in every limb, but to do something for someone was a thing that

always appealed to her, especially when the someone had as much charm of manner as this kindly doctor.

"His name is John Standish, and he is lodging with Mrs. Mark Lewis in the High Street. You can't fail to know the house; it is a queer, old-fashioned place, with a bay window built out over the street door."

"I know the place," answered Joan curtly, and try as she would she could not help a frosty stiffness creeping into her manner.

The doctor did not appear to notice it; he was busy binding her left hand, and he went on talking as he worked. "You will be sure to go this morning, because I promised him that I would see that Mrs. Lewis was informed about his accident, and warned as to the keeping of his papers. A very superior young man. Well-educated, too, I should say. He told me he had been working in a munition factory in Manchester, but had left that in order to enter the army. However, he won't be fit for much for the next two months, I am afraid. Indeed, I am thinking that he would scarcely have had a chance of life at all, if it had not been for you, Miss Haysome."

Two minutes ago Joan would have thrilled with sheer joyfulness to know she had saved a man's life; but now she was so mortified to think that the stranger had been lodging with her aunt, that she could think of nothing but the hurt to her pride, when she should have to go there to do the doctor's errand. She was glad that her

mother was not in the room at that moment, for Mrs. Haysome would certainly have said that Mrs. Mark Lewis was her husband's sister.

The doctor was in a great hurry to get on to his next case. He went off the minute he had finished with Joan's hands, and she was left to carry out his request with as little delay as might be.

CHAPTER II

Aunt Mary

THE BEACON stood quite on the outskirts of Swanton. Joan had to go down the long, steep hill to the pier before turning into the High Street. At the bottom of the hill, just at the end of Institute Road, she paused to look in at Allenson's showroom windows. There were new hats there in bewildering variety. Remembering how she had completely ruined one hat this morning, she paused to see if there was anything in the windows that she would like. A white hat caught her fancy immediately. She turned towards the door of the shop, then paused irresolute, remembering the doctor's injunction to her to make no delay in going to tell Mrs. Lewis about safeguarding the papers. If she did not go now, the hat might be bought by someone else before she came back; and Joan suddenly decided that she could not be happy without that particular headgear. True, there might be others like it in the shop, but that was not much comfort. She did not want there to be any others like it; equally she did not want anyone else to be before her in buying the one that was in the window.

"I shall not be more than five minutes buying the hat. I can wear it, and have this one sent home," she said with a satisfied nod, and pushing open the door went in.

The shop was nearly full of customers. What a lot of people wanted new hats that morning! When, after considerable delay, Joan had purchased her hat, she bought herself a pair of roomy silk gloves that would slip on over the bandages. One or two other things appealed to her, and the buying of them took time. She saw as she went up the High Street that she had been half an hour at Allenson's, and she was a little bit ashamed of it.

There can scarcely be a more picturesque place anywhere than Swanton High Street, the charm of it always appealed to the beauty-loving soul of Joan. And she always lingered at the part where a break in the lines of the quaint old houses gave a view of the bay and the hills. It was clear enough this morning for the white outlines of Old Harry Rock to show on the outer end of the line of hills. The rocks there had spelled disaster for many a score of brave seamen; she was thinking of them as she stood looking at the play of the sunshine on the blue water and the white cliffs. Then a perambulator, pushed by a careless nursemaid, ran into her, and she was rudely recalled to her surroundings and reminded to make haste.

She had almost reached the funny old house that

had a bay window built out over the front door, and she was feeling acutely conscious of the embarrassment of the interview lying just ahead of her. As she was looking at the house, and wondering a little how she would introduce herself, she saw the door open, and a young man emerge. He had a big bundle of books and papers under his arm, and he was carrying a bag. He opened the gate with difficulty, and letting it bang behind him, came walking down the street towards Joan. Just because he had come out of the house to which she was going, she took a good look at him as he passed her, and she noticed that he had a deep scar over his left eyebrow. The scar was the only vivid impression she had of him; for the rest he was very ordinary-looking, and his attire was in keeping with his appearance.

"Another of the lodgers, I expect," she said to herself, and an actual shiver went over her, for it seemed hateful that she was compelled to own kinship with a woman who earned a living by letting apartments to seaside visitors.

Making a real effort to look as pleasant as possible, Joan stepped in through the gateway, and, ringing the bell, waited for someone to admit her. She had to wait a considerable time, too, then the door was opened hurriedly, and a quiet-looking little woman stood before her.

"Can I speak to Mrs. Lewis if you please—Mrs.

Mark Lewis," said Joan, suddenly remembering that her father had said something about her Aunt Mary having sheltered her dead husband's mother for more years than anyone could remember; indeed, it was one of the things he had brought forward as a reason why Joan should treat her aunt with love and kindness, instead of neglecting her altogether.

"I am Mrs. Mark Lewis," said the little woman. Her voice was low and refined. She had such a sweet smile, too, that Joan felt a sudden liking for her, and stretched out an impulsive hand in greeting.

"Then you are my Aunt Mary. I am Joan Haysome, your eldest niece, and will you please forgive me for not having come sooner to make your acquaintance?"

"Come in, my dear child, and please do not apologize about such a thing," said Mrs. Mark Lewis. Then she drew Joan into a funny little sitting-room, which had a ceiling so low that Joan, who was tall, felt as if she would knock it with the top of her hat. "Amy and the boys come in to see me most days, and your mother has been several times. I was quite sure that you would come in due course."

It was then that Joan had the grace to be deadly ashamed of herself, and she was brave enough to own up, even though it might cost her the friendship of this little woman, who was so different from what she had expected her to be.

"I ought to have come before, Aunt Mary. If you

don't feel like forgiving me for my neglect, why I shall just have to bear it. I am very sorry I did not come. I can see quite clearly that it has been my loss, my very great loss. I am feeling this minute that I would rather have your love and liking than anything else, yet I have got to own that it has been my hateful pride that has kept me away. I did not come because—because you let apartments to people.”

“I knew that,” replied Mrs. Mark Lewis, as she drew Joan to a seat on a roomy old sofa covered in brown, and then sat down beside her. “But there is no more disgrace in letting lodgings than in letting houses, although I grant you there is more work, and your father has a good deal of house property.”

“Oh, I know it has been hateful of me, but I had to own to it. I could not come to you with an excuse that was not the truth,” said Joan, whose inherent honesty would not let her rest until her aunt knew the very worst there was to know about her.

“My dear child, I have not blamed you for not coming,” her aunt said softly. “It is quite possible that in your place, and under the circumstances, I should have done just the same, for we are all very human at the bottom. But you will come and see me sometimes now, Joan, because we know each other, and so everything is changed between us.”

“Yes, of course I shall come now, Aunt Mary. Indeed, you may find that you are likely to have too

much of me; but in that case you will just have to tell me when I am in the way, or, better still, let me help you with your work. That would be a really good idea."

Mrs. Mark Lewis laughed, and putting up a work-worn hand stroked Joan's cheek with a caressing movement. "I think my lodgers would be rather embarrassed to have such a smart young lady to answer the bell when they rang for anything. It would be quite too funny to see you standing meekly to receive orders. No, I don't think you were adapted by nature or training for running a house of this sort, my dear child."

"Speaking of lodgers, that reminds me," said Joan with a little start of recollection; "I came to tell you, Aunt Mary, that Mr. John Standish has been very much hurt by a rock-slide on the Durling undercliff. He is lying at our house with a broken leg, a broken arm, and bruises and cuts too numerous to mention."

"Oh, I am sorry! He is such a nice fellow too, so hard-working and studious. I have just been talking to Mr. Forbes about him, and we have been saying how hard it was for him to have this disaster just as he was going into the army."

"Then you knew that Mr. Standish had been hurt?" asked Joan in surprise.

"Yes; Mr. Forbes told me, when he came to take away the papers and the other things that Mr. Standish wanted," replied Mrs. Mark Lewis.

Joan stiffened instantly. If someone else was there to look after things for the injured man, why had she been sent by the doctor to ask that the papers and books might be taken care of? Then she remembered that, but for having been sent in this fashion, she would certainly not have had the pleasure of making her aunt's acquaintance just then. So she merely said: "The doctor did not tell me there was anyone else to come, and I do not think that Mr. Standish could have mentioned Mr. Forbes to him, or he would not have been in such a hurry for me to come here."

Mrs. Mark Lewis shook her head with a little motion of bewilderment. "I don't understand either, but there it is. Mr. Forbes said that John, that is Mr. Standish, was badly 'bashed up' by a rock-slide; and that he, as the poor man's closest friend, had come to sort up his papers and carry them off to safety. Of course they would have been safe enough here for the matter of that, if only they had been locked up; but Mr. Forbes said some of the work would have to be done this week, and, as Mr. Standish was out of count, he was going to do it for his friend. If you had been here five minutes sooner you would have met Mr. Forbes, for he had only just gone when you came."

"I suppose I did meet him, only of course I did not know him," said Joan. "A man came out of the house just as I came up the street. He was carrying a lot of papers, and he had a bag in his hand."

"That was Mr. Forbes. A very kind friend to Mr. Standish, I should fancy, but not exactly a prepossessing individual. Now, my dear Joan, I shall have to turn you out, for I have to cook a midday meal for my lodgers. Try and come to see me again soon, only let it be in the afternoon or evening, as I have most leisure then. Tell Mr. Standish that I have sent him all sorts of kind messages through Mr. Forbes, and I hope they will be delivered properly, though men mostly muddle messages in the carrying."

Joan laughed as she turned away from the door; and she went her way down the High Street feeling that this morning should after all be marked with a white stone, for it was worth a great deal to have made the acquaintance of one who had as much charm of manner as her Aunt Mary. She was just wondering whether she would go home by the way past the Cottage Hospital, or by the road leading up from the shore, when a smart private motor, which had slowed down for traffic, halted close behind her, and a girl's voice cried out eagerly:

"Joan! Joan Haysome! is it really you, or the ghost of you? But indeed, and in truth, you are a sight for sore eyes, and you look as if it is always fine weather where you are!"

Joan faced round in a great hurry, and with some annoyance in her manner too. People were looking at her in surprise as they passed; and well they might,

for the voice which accosted her was shrill and carried far.

"Nancy Pringle, how wonderful to find you here!" she exclaimed; then stopped suddenly, flushing with keen pleasure as she saw that Nancy's mother was seated in the car. Mrs. Pringle was a great personage in the eyes of Joan. She was the author of three books that had sold well; she was rich, and she had a social standing which lifted her far above the circles in which the Haysomes moved.

Mrs. Pringle was leaning forward with outstretched hand and a winning smile. "My dear Joan, we are so very glad to see you. Get in, and come a little way with us, dear. We cannot linger here, we are upsetting the traffic. There are some army wagons coming down the hill; they will not be able to pass us here, and we shall be voted a public nuisance."

Joan obeyed without another word. Indeed, there was not much chance of a hearing if she protested. Another motor was coming up the hill, and hooting wildly as it came. A man with a coal-cart was backing his vehicle to make room for the army wagons, and shouting to his horse; while the clatter and noise of the traffic on the stone-paved street made an indescribable din.

Mrs. Pringle's car slid forward, missing the coal-cart by about half an inch, and only just avoiding a collision with the motor that was coming up the hill.

"My word, that was a near shave!" called back Nancy, who was in front with the chauffeur, whilst Joan sat behind with Mrs. Pringle. "But 'a miss is as good as a mile', and such things do really give a zest to motoring."

"For my part, I prefer a little less excitement," replied her mother, with the slow drawl in her speech which Joan had always secretly admired. Then she went on, turning to the girl at her side: "My dear Joan, it was a most fortunate meeting, and I am sure we should not have seen you if it had not been for having to go dead slow because of the traffic. Are you staying in Swanton, dear, or are you only here for the day?"

"Father has taken a house here for three months," said Joan a little shyly. She always felt nervous when talking to Nancy's mother. Mrs. Pringle was so very superior; she had the air of being on a plane above the ordinary everyday sort of person. Usually, too, her manner was distant and detached, and Joan felt swept off her feet somewhat by this exceeding graciousness of manner.

"How very pleasant for you all! Nancy and I must come to call some day when we are in Swanton," said Mrs. Pringle. "We are staying inland at a place called Castle Friars; the actual seaside does not suit me very well. We are going to Bolton Beaches now; do you know the place at all?"

"I have heard of it," answered Joan. "I really want to see it too, for people say there are the most lovely shells to be found there; but we have not been anywhere yet. The children are quite satisfied with the bathing and the fishing, and until they get restless Mother will not stir to go out for excursions."

"Come with us this morning," said Mrs. Pringle. "We have brought our lunch with us, and we are going to feed in the most primitive fashion imaginable; but if you don't mind that, we shall just love to have you with us, and we can bring you back here this evening."

"I should love it!" cried Joan, whose eyes were shining, and whose cheeks were flushed with pleasure. "But I am afraid that Mother will wonder what has become of me if I don't turn up at lunch or early tea."

"Stop at the post office, please," said Mrs. Pringle, leaning forward to speak to the chauffeur; then she turned back to Joan: "Just scribble a note to your mother, and we will send it by express messenger. There is mostly a way when one wants very badly to do things, and we really want your company very much indeed."

Joan fairly thrilled. What a day it was! There had been no moment since she went down the path to the Durling undercliff that had not been filled full with real active living. It was the slow monotony of life that palled on her so much. When things moved so fast

as to absorb her utterly, then she was content. She scribbled the note to her mother, and Nancy went into the post office to have it dispatched. Afterwards came the ride to Bolton Beaches. The road went winding round through a gap in the hills, then mounted up and up and up: oh, it was wonderful! She kept crying out with pleasure and delight, and the others laughed at her enthusiasm, but they enjoyed it too. Then came Bolton Beaches—a misnamed place, by the way, for there was no beach, nothing but great boulders of red and yellow sandstone, with wide stretches of silvery sand.

The smart car was run into a corner out of the way. The chauffeur disappeared, with instructions to return at six o'clock, and then the fun began. Mrs. Pringle behaved as if she were a girl of sixteen or so, and seeing the sea for the first time. Nancy and Joan followed suit, the three of them dancing and frolicking in the water, making sand castles as if they were little children, and then wading for miles along the shallow water of the shore picking up shells, and screaming with delight when crabs fastened on their toes. Oh, it was certainly glorious fun! Once or twice Joan thought of the sick man who had been rescued from such danger and discomfort, but she did not let her mind dwell on him very much. It was the joy of the moment that absorbed her, and she was making the very most of it.

CHAPTER III

Consternation for Joan

THE most joyful day must come to an end at some time. The party of three came back from the long wading in the shallow waters of the shore. They donned shoes and stockings, then went off to the little tea-house above the sands to get some tea. The mother and daughter, who had looked so smart in the morning, had an oddly dishevelled, almost rakish look, while even Joan had lost much of her wonted prim neatness of appearance. She was quite deliriously happy. Mrs. Pringle knew so many of the rich and great, talking of them just as if they were the most ordinary of people. It thrilled Joan beyond the power of words to describe to hear the Dowager Duchess of Beaufort spoken of as Kate or Katie; and, when Nancy mentioned casually a week-end visit she had paid to a Roumanian princess, living for the present in Brighton, Joan felt fairly awed at her own good fortune in having such well-placed and important friends.

It was nearer seven than six when at last the car glided upwards from the shore and took the hill road

back to Swanton again. Joan leaned back in her luxurious corner, and had to admit to herself that she was really very tired indeed.

"You will be home just in time to dress for dinner, I should say," remarked Mrs. Pringle. Her voice had dropped back to its old drawl now that she was in the car again, and the aloofness had come back to her manner. Joan was quick to notice it, and, truth to tell, to resent it, for this chilly dignity emphasized the difference there was socially between herself and this cultured, aristocratic woman, so she just murmured a half-inaudible yes, instead of saying right out that it was not the rule in her home to dress for late dinner; indeed, very often the meal was not dinner at all, but a rather scrambled kind of supper, very homely and comfortable, but without the least pretension to style.

"Joan, you must come out with us again!" cried Nancy, facing round from her seat in front. "I am sure it must have been your influence that has made us unbend so thoroughly to-day. I felt as if I should go into hysterics at the sight of Mother with her skirts clutched firmly round her knees, and wading as if she were only about six years old. You are a witch, Joan. There is no other word for it; and we owe you a deep debt of gratitude for helping us to forget for a few short hours that there are any such things as conventions and nonsense of that sort."

Poor Joan! Nancy had meant to be downright complimentary, but she had only succeeded in humiliating her, and mortifying her more than she had ever been mortified before. Of course, she had to make some sort of reply, but what it was she could not have told. All the pleasure of the swift progress along the hilly road was gone. Even the joy of the day behind her was clouded too, and she was glad indeed when the car came to a stand at the bottom of the hill, by the pier entrance.

"You are sure that you can manage to get home all right?" queried Mrs. Pringle with languid politeness.

"Quite sure, thank you," murmured Joan, as the chauffeur came round to her side to open the door. "I am so grateful to you for my happy day."

"Ta-ta, Joan dear! We will come for you again very soon, and you shall teach us to forget Mrs. Grundy, and to return to primitive ways of living," called out Nancy as the car shot forward again; and there were actual tears in Joan's eyes as she turned away to ascend the hill to The Beacon. It was just horrid of Nancy Pringle even to be thinking that it was she, Joan, who had suggested playing barefooted on the sands and in the water. Why, she had always steadily refused to join Amy and the boys in paddling, because it had always seemed so much beneath her dignity. Somehow, it was increasingly difficult to make people understand

her. She wondered as she toiled up the long hill if it were her fault, or whether the blame lay with other people.

It was almost eight o'clock by the time she reached home. As she let herself into the house an almost overpowering odour of fried fish assailed her nostrils, and she paused in amazement, standing a moment on the door-mat to take in the situation before going any farther. It was just then that the dining-room door opened, and Amy appeared on the threshold.

"Oh, Joan, have you turned up at last?" she cried cheerfully. "Come along; we are all at supper. It is lucky you happened along when you did. If you had been much later, there might not have been any left for you."

"What do you mean?" asked Joan, as she followed her sister into the dining-room, where her father and the boys were gathered about the table, her mother not being present just then.

"What I said, of course," replied Amy, who was a rather flippant young person, and with no repose of manner or speech—a perfect hoyden, in fact. "Cook was too busy to cook dinner to-night, for the poor man upstairs has wanted about as much attention as a whole hospitalful of patients to-day, so we asked to have fried fish and chipped potatoes—just that and nothing else. You should have seen the piles that were put on the table, but they are nearly all gone. Mighty good it

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was! I should like that sort of supper once a week regularly all the summer."

"Come along, Joan, my dear, and get your supper!" called her father heartily; and Joan winced as she noticed that he was not in evening dress—had not changed, indeed, since the morning. It was silly, of course, to care so much about little things of that sort, and still more silly to suffer as she was doing, just because there was not more form and ceremonial observance in her home.

It was because she realized something of the foolishness of her own attitude that she answered her father with a cheerful word and a gay little laugh, and then went to sit at his end of the table, dislodging one of the boys in order to get room for herself. Then, as she ate her supper, she told her father of her visit to Bolton Beaches, and the happy time she had spent with Mrs. Pringle and Nancy. She even told of how they had paddled, and of the screaming fun they had had.

"Pringle is rather a big man," said Mr. Haysome in a reflective tone. "His business was pretty badly hit by the war, but he was rich enough to have let it go, and not to have troubled himself about it; only he happened to be very much of a patriot, so he cleared his warehouses, instituted new plant, and set up a sort of laboratory for making poison gas of every conceivable sort. How did you get to know his folks, Joan?"

"I met them when I was staying with the Langtons at Torquay, in the spring," replied Joan, who was eating fried fish and chipped potatoes with all the zest of a young and healthy appetite.

"I have heard that his wife is a bit of a swell, and never contented at home," went on Mr. Haysome. "They have a lovely place a few miles out of Manchester; but it is funny that the better the home a man makes for his wife, the more eager she is to run about the world and leave it."

"Mrs. Pringle is a lady, and very well connected," said Joan, on the defensive now for her friend.

Amy gurgled with laughter, and there was a smothered explosion from the two elder boys because of the prim superiority of Joan's tone; but at that moment Mrs. Haysome came into the room, and sat down heavily in her place at the table. She looked so tired and worn that Joan was immediately concerned because of her very evident exhaustion.

"Have you wanted me, Mother? Did I do wrong to go out for so long?" she asked, with swift compunction at her own selfishness in taking her pleasure.

"You could not have helped in the nursing," said Mrs. Haysome. "Of course there were a good many things you might have done, but there was no real need for you to be at home, and I hope you had a pleasant time."

Certainly if Mrs. Haysome had wanted to make Joan

feel her selfishness in being away so long, she could not have taken a surer means for doing it. Of course the right thing for Joan to have done would have been to come straight back from her errand to Mrs. Mark Lewis, and to have stood by her mother for the remainder of that strenuous and anxious day.

"How is the poor man, Mother?" she asked. She was wishing and wishing that she could let her mother understand how she felt, but she was much too reserved to be able to put the feeling into words.

"Very bad, my dear. I think the draught is beginning to take effect now, but he has suffered fearfully all day. He has wandered in his mind a great deal, too, and he has seemed to think that we are all German spies. Very uncomfortable it has been, and so sad that we could not help him more. Now that we have got nurses for him it will not be so bad, of course."

"Poor Mother!" murmured Joan, and again there was the swift pang of regret that she had not stood by her mother through the day.

Everyone went to bed early; they usually did at The Beacon, the long days spent in the open air did not tend to late hours at night. Joan hovered about her mother with real daughterly devotion; she was doing her very best to atone for her selfishness, yet wondering a little ruefully whether one always had to repent for taking one's pleasure.

Her penitential mood was still to the fore the next

morning, and she helped her mother in the ordering of the house for the day, instead of going out as usual directly breakfast was over. The doctor came in early for a flying visit, because he was anxious to know how Mr. Standish had got through the night. Directly he had gone, the nurse on duty called down the stairs to know if Miss Haysome would kindly come at once, as her patient wanted to ask some question, and would not be denied or put off.

"I expect he wants to thank me, poor man, for all that I was able to do for him," Joan murmured to herself as she went up the stairs. A little thrill of gratification went through her as she thought of yesterday morning, and how a man actually owed his life to her efforts to save him. Her hands were sore and her arms were stiff, but that was a small price to pay for all the joy of spending herself for the good of a fellow-creature.

The nurse was rather elderly, and she had a grim face; her manner, too, was sharp and dictatorial when she spoke to Joan, though she softened in quite a marvellous manner as she bent over her patient and endeavoured to soothe him.

"I want to speak to Miss Haysome. Has she come? Where is she?" demanded the injured man, with so much eager anxiety that Joan thrilled anew because he wanted to see her so badly. It was lovely to evoke gratitude; she flushed and grew hot all over as she

thought how she would reply to his words of thanks. Then the nurse beckoned her forward, and she came to stand within the range of vision of the man who lay on the bed, and who owed his life to what she had done for him.

John Standish was so bound and bandaged that it was almost an impossibility for him to lift himself in any way, but he looked at Joan as if he would devour her in his eagerness as he burst into impetuous speech. "Did you ask Mrs. Lewis to lock my papers safely away, and where is the key?"

A sudden chill crept into the heart of Joan. The man was not thinking of her at all, and he seemed to have no single thought about his indebtedness to her. She drew herself up with a little air of offence that she certainly did not mean should be visible, but which was yet most plainly apparent. "When I reached the house of Mrs. Lewis, she told me that your friend, Mr. Forbes, had already been and taken the papers away with him. Of course if I had known that Mr. Forbes was going to do this for you, I should not have gone into the town just then."

Joan thought she had a right to be reproachful. If she had not gone down to Swanton on the errand of Mr. Standish, she would not have met Mrs. Pringle and Nancy, so she would not have been away so long, neglecting her mother and the duties of home. It was quite nice to have someone to throw the blame upon,

though of course it was really horrid that the man should forget what he owed to her.

"What do you mean? What did you say, someone went and took the papers away?" The man was making desperate efforts to rise now, squirming round under the bed-clothes, his face working with excitement. The nurse stooped over him and tried to calm him.

"It was Mr. Forbes, your friend, who took the papers. He told Mrs. Lewis that you had sent him," said Joan, and then shrank back, appalled at the storm her words evoked.

"It is false!" cried the man on the bed, and his voice rose to a shriek. "I have no friend named Forbes. Those papers were of the last importance. If anything has happened to them I am a ruined man. Worse than that, if they have fallen into enemy hands valuable knowledge has got into the power of the enemy. Give me my clothes, Nurse; I must get up and see to this business at once."

"Hush, hush! You are not fit to get up. Lie still, and we will do things for you," said the nurse, bending over the bed and doing everything in her power to soothe the excitement of her patient.

She might as well have attempted to turn a river back on its course. John Standish thrust out his one uninjured hand, pushing her aside, and beckoning to Joan to come nearer. "Where did the man Forbes come from, what was he like, and when did he get the

papers? Please tell me quick; such a lot depends on it."

Joan was moved with pity for his distress. There was a great consternation in her heart too, because of the way in which she had loitered over the errand. If she had not stayed to buy that new hat, she would have certainly arrived in time to prevent the papers being taken away. Coming a little nearer to the bed, she told him how she had seen a man leaving the house of Mrs. Lewis, and then had arrived to find that the papers had been taken away by him.

"Would you know him again?" demanded John Standish, and again there was the look of devouring eagerness in his eyes from which she shrank back affrighted.

"I think so," she replied, but doubtfully, for she was not specially good at remembering faces, and she could recall nothing distinctive about Mr. Forbes, saving the scar above his left eyebrow, which had impressed her in quite a remarkable fashion.

"Think so! We shall need something clearer than that to go upon," cried the injured man impatiently. "Nurse, Nurse, help me into my clothes. I must get up somehow. Call a cab for me, please, Miss Haysome. I must get down to the police station as quickly as I can. When did you say the papers were taken? Yesterday morning? Good Patience! Just think for yourselves what may have been happening since then. My

clothes, Nurse, my clothes as quick as you can! I must get up, I tell you."

"But you cannot get up," said the nurse. She was putting out every bit of power that she possessed in her effort to calm his excitement. "You have a broken leg and a broken arm; if you attempt to get up now, the bones will have to be set again."

"As if that mattered!" John Standish flung her a glance of withering scorn, and waved his one useful arm to push her away. "As if anything mattered in comparison with the need of getting back those papers. Do you realize that I had better be dead than to live and lose them in such a fashion?"

"You soon will be dead if you go on at this rate," burst out the nurse, who was now getting nearly as worried as the patient himself. Her concern was for him. He would do himself serious damage, had perhaps done it already. Her reputation was at stake. When she came on duty that morning the doctor had warned her that the patient must be kept as quiet as possible; all tendency to excitement must be most carefully repressed, otherwise there was danger of fever.

"I must get up at once, I tell you I must!" shouted the patient. Because of the noise he was making, Mrs. Haysome came hurrying into the room, and joined forces with the nurse in trying to soothe him.

Joan had shrunk into the background. Of choice

she would have bolted from the room. There was in her, however, a sort of blind determination to take the blame for her own actions. If she had done wrong, then she was willing to suffer—aye, and to suffer to the full extent of the penalty if need be. It looked, too, as if she might be needed to call for more help, or even to give her assistance in holding the patient in bed by sheer force.

“I must get up. I tell you I must get up!” he shouted. The efforts he was making had greatly upset him already. He had lost control and was shouting wildly. The maids had come tearing up when they heard the noise, and stood grouped about the open door of the bedroom, anxious to render what help they could. Joan waved to them to keep outside the door. It was surely not well that the poor fellow should have more witnesses than need be to his break-down.

“Nurse, Nurse, for the love of Heaven, help me get up!” He had ceased to struggle for the moment, and was pleading and pleading with her. Joan felt a big lump come up in her throat. She wanted to cry from sheer pity. And all the time she was telling herself that this need not have been if only she had done her duty yesterday, and had gone straight to the house of Mrs. Lewis instead of staying to buy that hat.

“Help me to hold him, Miss Haysome,” called the nurse sharply.

Joan sprang forward and laid a firm hand on the

shoulder of the man, who was again making desperate efforts to rise. Her mother was on the other side of the bed, and the nurse appeared to be in two places at once, so quick was she in moving here and there. Her fear was that the broken bones would be unset again. A very reasonable fear, too, seeing the wild struggling of the man on the bed. Joan's face was as white as the sheets, but there was the light of courage in her eyes. Desperately afraid she was. But seeing that the situation was in a measure her own making, she was not going to shrink or to show the white feather.

John Standish dropped back as if clean exhausted. "Poor, dear fellow, how terrible it is!" exclaimed Mrs. Haysome, dropping her hold of him for a moment, while she fumbled for her pocket-handkerchief to wipe away the tears of sympathy that were blinding her kindly eyes.

It was just then that he rose in the bed again, wriggled from under the hand of Joan, and before anyone could stop him, hurled himself clean out of bed on to the floor. One wild grab at him Joan gave, but missed. He was too quick for her, too quick for the nurse, and before they realized what was happening, he was lying on the floor on the other side of the bed. Mrs. Haysome was crying aloud. To Joan's amazement she saw that the nurse, that hard-faced, capable person, was crying too. Carefully they lifted him from the floor and laid him back in the bed. No need to

hold him down now; he appeared to have fainted from the pain.

One of the maids was sent off to fetch the doctor. In the middle of the confusion Mr. Haysome came walking into the house, and Joan suddenly realized what a tower of strength her father could be in an emergency. She had got into the way of somehow despising her father because he was such a plain, uncultured man, or so she reckoned him, and failed to grasp the fact that the highest form of culture is that of the heart.

"Poor fellow! I wish I had been here before," said Mr. Haysome. "Nurse, why didn't you insist on having more help when you found how delirious he was?"

"He was not delirious, Mr. Haysome. That is what makes it so really tragic," replied the nurse, who was hard at work trying to bring her patient out of his swoon. "The poor man is in desperate trouble about a lot of papers that appear to have been stolen. When he recovers consciousness this burden of trouble will drop down upon him, and I don't see, I really don't see how he is going to stand up against it all."

"What papers? How did he come to know that they were stolen?" demanded Mr. Haysome in blank bewilderment.

Joan spoke then. How much she hated having to own herself in the wrong no one could possibly know. She was so proud. Indeed it seemed as if all the pride

of the family had concentrated in her person. But at least she was honest, and she was not going to sit down under false pretences of being better than she really was.

"It was my fault, Father. The doctor asked me to go to Aunt Mary yesterday, and to tell her that Mr. Standish wanted her to lock his papers up very carefully, and I was to bring away the key, because they were of value. I did not go as fast as I might. I stayed to buy a new hat on the way. When I did get to Aunt Mary's house it was to find that a man had been there before me. He had taken all the papers away, saying that he was a friend who had been sent for them."

"That looked queer on the face of it," said Mr. Haysome. "Why did not you come straight home and tell us about it?"

"I thought it was all right, of course," answered Joan. "I was even a little offended because I had had an unnecessary walk. I stayed and talked to Aunt Mary until she told me I must go, as she had a lot of work to do. Then as I came away I met Mrs. Pringle and Nancy, and I went off with them for the rest of the day, as you know."

Mr. Haysome was silent for a minute as he stood watching the limp figure on the bed. The poor man was unconscious still. When he was able to remember, then his fiercest suffering would begin. It seemed almost

a pity that the nurse could not leave him in peace for a time, instead of working in such a tireless fashion to bring him round.

“From what I can gather, you have made a pretty big muddle of things this time, Joan. But it is of no use grumbling at you, for you will only cry about it, and then forget again. Your worst punishment will be to see that poor fellow suffer. We may even have to pity you instead of giving you the blame you seem to deserve.”

Joan shivered and turned white. Thinking she saw signs of returning consciousness in Mr. Standish, she slipped out of the room, for she simply could not bear to witness the trouble she had caused. Was her father right, she wondered, and would her worst punishment be to witness the misery she had caused? Mr. Standish had said that if the papers were lost he would be ruined—nay, worse than that, valuable knowledge would have been given to the enemy, and Joan was patriotic to her finger-tips. Indeed, she fairly bristled with patriotism, so for her the outlook was unthinkable.

CHAPTER IV

Doing her Best

THE doctor was found, and came hurrying back to the house. He was not in the best of tempers, for the sudden summons upset his plans, and threw the work of the day all out of joint, and doctors are only human beings after all. He was angry in real earnest when he saw his patient and realized that the setting of the broken bones had to be done over again. He gave the nurse a very bad time of it, despite the championship of Mr. Haysome, who was there to help as much as he could.

The nurse, however, knew that she was not to blame. She knew also that the doctor would be the first to admit that later on, and until then she could wait.

It was Joan who suffered. She was hurt every way. Her satisfaction in herself had received a heavy blow. She had never had a jolt like that before. It would not have seemed so terrible if the loss had not concerned the man she had rescued from such an awkward plight. To do a kindness with one hand, then to have it knocked down as it were with the other; oh, it was hateful

to think she could have acted like that! Then, too, she had always wanted to do something really great for her country. She had just yearned to distinguish herself. Here was a chance ready-made for her. She might have caught a spy red-handed and have achieved real renown, but she had failed to seize the opportunity; she had not even realized that it was an opportunity, and so all this trouble had resulted. If only she had not stopped to buy that hat!

The trouble is that remorse is so ineffectual in mending matters. Joan cried until her eyes were red and her nose was swollen. She had such a fearful headache, too, that she hardly knew how to walk about. But when her father came to ask her to go to the police station with him, she just tried to forget that her head was aching at all, since it was her plain duty to do what she could towards mending the muddle she had made.

Of course it was downright horrid having to go out and meet people in the street while she was looking such a sight, but that was part of her punishment, and it was of no use to try and shirk it. In her own mind she was positive that she had to pay the price of her own actions. If she endeavoured to dodge the penalty in one way, it was certain she would have to face it in some other direction, so the best thing was to go straight on doing what was required of her, and to put up with unpleasantness without wincing.

The police of Swanton were very alert and intelligent. They had to be. The large military camp just outside the town may have had its influence in sharpening the faculties of heads of departments. The inspector who received Mr. Haysome and Joan was a quiet-looking man with a keen eye. Joan had an uncomfortable feeling that he was looking straight through her as he proceeded to question her with most disconcerting directness.

"The doctor told you that the papers about which Mr. Standish was concerned were important. How was it that you did not trouble to go back to Mr. Standish at once, and to tell him of this mysterious friend who had turned up to relieve him of them?"

Joan flushed. How horrid it was to have to submit to all this, to know that she was in the wrong!

"I was really a little offended that I should have been sent on an unnecessary errand. If Mr. Standish had a friend to take care of his things for him, it seemed childish and useless for me to be sent on the same errand. It never struck me that the papers might be of such great importance. People do magnify their own little concerns into such big ones when viewed from their own estimates. Of course it was very wrong of me, and no one can be more sorry than I am; only, the worst of it is, that no amount of being sorry will undo the mischief."

"That is so," remarked the inspector gravely. Then

he began to question Joan about the part she had played when the rock-slide took place. "You were down on the undercliff at the actual time of the occurrence, I understand. Did you see the man before the slide took place?"

"No," answered Joan. "I was coming down the narrow path from The Beacon when I heard the crashing of the rocks and rubbish; then, when I got lower down, I found that my favourite seat had been completely buried. It was while I was surveying the ruin that I found there was the foot of a man sticking out of the rubbish."

"Did you see anyone else hanging about the undercliff as you went down, or did you meet anyone on the path as you came up?" asked the inspector.

"Why, no. If there had been anyone about they would have come to my help," replied Joan. "Why, I shrieked and shrieked, and there was no one near enough to hear me but my small brother, Lucas, whom I sent to call help for me."

"All the same, there must have been someone on hand." The inspector spoke in a musing tone, as if he were sizing up the situation from every point of view. "A rock-slide could not have started just then and there if there had not been something to help it along. The only possible inference is that Mr. Standish was known to possess papers that would be of use to the enemy. A close watch was set upon him, and

when he was walking in the undercliff someone else was walking there too, a someone who used an iron bar as a lever with which to send a rock-slide down at just the right time for putting Mr. Standish out of action. The mysterious part of the business is that the papers were not stolen sooner, the thief was running considerable risks in waiting so long. If you had gone straight to the house of Mrs. Lewis you would have been in time to stop him, and yet from your own showing you were not even asked to go until the doctor had finished with his patient."

"You said the rocks were levered out with an iron bar. Have you found it?" asked Mr. Haysome.

"Yes; it was in some blackberry brambles farther up the cliff—a bar painted to look like a walking-stick, but strong enough to heave out a great mass of rock. It is easy enough to see that it was a well-planned affair; the pity is that we were not able to catch the fellow at the house of Mrs. Lewis. We should probably have found that we had got hold of a very clever spy." The inspector heaved a sigh, and looked genuinely troubled; but he said no single word of blame to Joan, who by this time was feeling that she would rather people did abuse her.

There was not much satisfaction to be got from the visit to the police. Joan had given a description of the man she had seen leaving the house of Mrs. Mark Lewis; but except for the mention of the scar over his left eye-

brow, there was only a vague uncertainty about anything she could say of him. She thought he had a white straw hat; she did not think he had any gloves; she did not know whether his clothes were brown or black or blue—they might even have been grey. Oh, it was maddening to think she had not observed him more closely! Such a chance of distinguishing herself might never come her way again, but she had bungled at every turn.

“If we had known yesterday, we might have been able to trace him, even with such a slight description,” said the inspector; “but to-day it seems a bit hopeless. However, we must just do our best, and keep our eyes open. Of course, Miss Haysome, you will not leave the town without letting us know; indeed, you should be on hand for a few days, never very far away, as we might need you in a hurry.”

“Must I keep in Swanton all day and every day?” asked Joan in some dismay. “My motor-cycle is coming through from home this week, and I wanted to go round exploring the neighbourhood.”

“You can do that, provided you come home every night,” replied the inspector with a genial laugh. “So you ride a motor-cycle? You are a very fortunate young lady to possess one.”

“That is what I tell her,” broke in Mr. Haysome. “When I was her age I was working hard from morning to night to earn my living; then when night came

I was adding to my education as best I could, so that I could get on in the world."

"Lucky for your daughter to have such a father. Swanton is very proud of you, Mr. Haysome. Wherever I go I hear stories of what you did in your youth, and how you struggled to make a name for yourself. It is a great pity that more young men are not made after your pattern."

"Humph! I am not so sure of that. It takes all sorts to make a world." Mr. Haysome never did sit down comfortably under talk of this sort. He was one of the most modest of men, in spite of his great satisfaction at his own powers of getting on in the world.

"I do not use my motor-cycle for my own pleasure merely," said Joan a little stiffly. "It is very useful to me in V.A.D. work; I do all the long-distance errands, and help in many ways."

The inspector bowed, looking properly impressed, but he had his private opinion all the same as to the use of young ladies in V.A.D. work. To his way of thinking, if one of the leisured classes set about trying to do something useful, it meant that a servant of some sort was necessary to do the work over again. Rich folks had their place in the scheme of creation, but their place was mainly to provide honest employment for other people.

Joan felt rather dreary as she went away from the police station with her father. It is never pleasant to

write oneself down a failure. She was conscious of having made a most fearful muddle of things, and she felt as if she would never be able to hold up her head again. If they had not come to Swanton this would never have happened; so she had another grudge against the place that had been her father's home in boyhood.

Amy and the boys had gone off to a picnic near some caves about two miles away. They had taken their lunch with them, so that the house might be the quieter, and they would probably not be home until dark.

Joan sat with her mother for an hour after lunch; then Mrs. Haysome went away to her room to get a sleep, while Mr. Haysome snored peacefully in a hammock chair outside in the garden. The sick-room was very quiet now. The nurse on duty moved in and out, where the needs of her patient required her, the servants were shut away in the kitchen premises, and there was hardly a sound to be heard.

How the silence palled on Joan! She must get away from the house; she simply could not stand it any longer. She would go and see Aunt Mary; perhaps the quiet little woman might have some comfort for her.

Down rushed Joan to the kitchen. "Cook, let my mother be told, when she wakes, that I have gone down to the town to see Mrs. Mark Lewis. And

please, is there anything that you want ordered from the shops?"

"Why yes, Miss Joan," replied Cook, and she paused, rolling-pin in hand, just to meditate on what she did want. She was making tea-cakes, and the patch of flour on her nose softened down the hard red of that feature. "The nurse was downstairs two minutes ago. She came to bring a list of things she wanted from the chemist's, and she asked that one of the maids might be sent at once; but one of them has gone for a walk, and I can't spare the other because I must have someone to answer the door."

"Give me the list, I will take it," said Joan cheerfully. It was really good to find something that wanted doing. "Am I to bring the things?"

"Good gracious, no, Miss Joan! Why, one of the articles is a hip-bath. You could hardly bring that up the hill without help. Just what a hip-bath is wanted for, seeing that the poor man is all broken up as he is, is more than I can tell." Cook waved her rolling-pin as if it were a baton, and she was conducting an orchestra.

Joan laughed. "I will be sure not to bring the hip-bath, and I will go straight to the chemist. He will know how to get the things here quickly, I expect."

It was hot to-day. Real July weather at last. Swanton appeared to be crammed with visitors, and the little town wore its most festive air. Visitors meant profit,

and Swanton folk were very keen on the main chance. Joan took the nearest way down to the chemist's shop, and dispatching her business with all speed, made her way to the funny old house in the High Street that had been her father's early home.

Two perambulators and a push-chair stood under the wide porch. A baby in one of the perambulators was crying stormily, while a little boy ran the push-chair bang against the front door for the sake of making a noise. There seemed to be no one in charge of the children, or so Joan thought at first; but when she had carefully pushed one perambulator away from the gate in order to get room to enter, and was fending the push-chair from her ankles against a well-directed drive from the small boy, a loud voice from inside the open bay-window demanded her business.

"I wish to see Mrs. Mark Lewis," replied Joan, and her tone was rather haughty. The small boy had caught her ankle in his industrious bombardment of the front door, and she was smarting considerably from the blow.

"You had better open the door, and walk straight down to the kitchen. Mrs. Lewis is there, I expect. But I warn you that if you are looking for rooms you won't find them here. Mrs. Lewis is full up, and will be for weeks to come, so it is only a waste of time to ask her."

"I am not looking for rooms, thank you," said Joan,

her tone more repressive than before. It was horrid to be talked to by this vulgar, red-faced woman in such a coolly patronizing way; but how very much more horrid it must be for Aunt Mary to be obliged to wait on people like that, to be compelled to cook their meals, to make their beds, and perhaps to clean their boots.

Softly she opened the door and stepped into the little entry. The sitting-rooms on either side of the door seemed to be simply overflowing with people. Two men in shirt-sleeves, and smoking big pipes, sprawled at ease on couches. One woman, very smartly dressed, was nursing a baby; while another woman, grossly fat and amazingly untidy, was putting a clean frock on to a child a little older than the boy who was still bombarding the door with the push-chair. All these details Joan took in at a glance, and then she stepped cautiously down the steep wooden stairs, and a moment later stood in the kitchen, where Mrs. Mark Lewis was hard at work washing piles of greasy earthenware. There was a big fire in the grate, and the kitchen was hot and stuffy despite the open window above the sink.

"My dear Joan!" exclaimed the little woman, turning from her dish-tub. There was real consternation in her voice, and, because of it, the something that was best and noblest in Joan woke to active life, and came as it were to the top.

With a merry laugh she seized a towel that hung on the back of a chair, and started on a pile of cups and

saucers, drying them with the air of an expert; and such she really was, thanks to the training she had been having at Lady Huntly's V.A.D. "My dear Aunt Mary, what a good thing it was that I happened along this afternoon! I shall feel that I dare talk to you while we are washing these things. If I am helping you I cannot be wasting your time, and I really need your help and sympathy very badly. I am a most unfortunate girl, and the great trouble is that I cannot even pity myself. If I had only done my duty there would have been no trouble, and oh, it is a galling thought!"

"I am trying to get used to the sight of my proud and well-placed niece washing and wiping the lodgers' dinner things," said Aunt Mary, turning from her bowl of dish-water for another look at Joan. "Oh, I know all about the V.A.D. work, and how you have been doing the tasks of a kitchen-maid this sometime past. But that sort of thing is fashionable now, and the doing of it carries no loss of prestige. To wash the dirty plates used by Mrs. Jones is quite another matter, and, dear Joan, you are made of finer stuff than I imagined!"

Joan winced. Of course, she knew that she deserved to be thought stuck-up and place-proud; all the same the reminders did hurt. No one could have been more innocent of intention to wound than Mrs. Mark Lewis, and Joan was beginning to realize what a fortunate girl

she was, to have so wise and kind a friend to whom to pour out her troubles just now. She stayed until all the dinner things were washed; then, having discovered that this afternoon hour was her aunt's one little bit of quiet time, she refused to stay any longer, so that Aunt Mary might not lose the benefit of the rest. She went upstairs to be introduced to old Mrs. Lewis, who was bedridden and deaf, and who had an attic bedroom with a window that gave a wide view over the bay. Then she left the house, marvelling anew at the fine spirit of her aunt. It was passing wonderful that anyone could face the burdens under which Mrs. Mark Lewis daily walked, and not repine a little; yet Joan had heard no word of complaint. Indeed, to her, Mrs. Lewis appeared the embodiment of joy.

It was hot toiling up the hill. Joan was almost inclined to get some tea in the town, and stay down on the front until it was cooler. A week ago she would have done it, believing her first duty was to make things comfortable for herself. She was beginning by slow degrees to discover that "no man liveth to himself alone", and the knowledge was necessitating considerable readjustment in her method of thought and action.

She loitered a good bit on the way, for really the afternoon was very hot. When at length she turned into the tree-shaded road leading to The Beacon, she was fluttered to find a motor-car drawn up in the shade of the big beech-tree that grew near to the entrance

gate. The doctor's car? No; his was such a shabby affair, while this was well turned-out, and with a smart chauffeur. A second glance at the man lounging at ease on the driver's seat, and Joan fairly groaned, for she recognized him as Mrs. Pringle's man, and that of course meant that Mrs. Pringle was calling on her mother.

Joan quickened her steps to a very fast walk. She had a nervous dread as to how the homely kindness of Mrs. Haysome would strike the languid and aristocratic Mrs. Pringle. If anyone had said to Joan in plain speech that she was ashamed of her mother, she would have been justly indignant—indeed she would have gone further, she would have been furiously angry; yet there was no getting past the fact that the plain speech and homely ways of Mrs. Haysome grated on her, and she was always wondering as to their effect on other people.

Passing in at the gate, she struck across the lawn, and made for the open French window of the drawing-room, as that was quicker than going in at the front door and along the hall. A burst of laughter greeted her as she neared the window. It was Mrs. Pringle who was laughing, and there was genuine amusement in the sound. The house had been kept so quiet all day, because of the sick man, that the mirth actually grated on Joan. Then she remembered that sounds from the drawing-room would hardly penetrate to the room at

the other side of the house, where John Standish was lying.

"Here comes Joan at last!" exclaimed Nancy Pringle, who had caught sight of Joan advancing across the grass. Then she rushed out to meet her friend, declaring that Joan looked sweeter than ever.

To be strictly truthful, Joan was not looking particularly sweet at that moment. She was hot and uncomfortable; she was very conscious of not looking her best, and she was absurdly bothered with worries as to the impression her mother might be making on Mrs. Pringle.

"Have you been here long?" Joan asked, as she emerged in a rather crumpled condition from the embrace of her friend.

"Nearly half an hour. We should have been gone again by this time, only your mother insisted on our staying for tea. Oh, Joan, isn't she a dear? Why did you not tell us what a charming mother you had?"

Why not? It had never even occurred to Joan that her mother was charming. All Mrs. Haysome's virtues and graces had been taken as it were for granted by her eldest daughter. A keen pang shot into the heart of Joan to think that a stranger had been more discerning than she herself with regard to her mother.

Mrs. Pringle was sitting beside Mrs. Haysome on the wide Chesterfield that was drawn near the window, and the parlour-maid was bringing in the tea. Nancy

and Joan, coming in together, sat down side by side at a little distance. Then Mr. Haysome came in from the garden, and the talk became general. All the haughty languor had vanished from Mrs. Pringle's manner; she was just happy and simple in her ways, as on the sands at Bolton Beaches. How wonderful that she should unbend so completely! Joan fairly thrilled with happiness to think of the haughty, exclusive Mrs. Pringle drinking tea so happily among the family at The Beacon, when something that lady was saying to her mother caught her ear, and filled her with dismay.

"Oh yes, Lady Huntly is a friend of mine. Indeed, I had a letter from her this morning, and she told me that she was intending to take her little hospital out to Salonika. There seems to be such a very great need for more V.A.D. work there, and dear Lady Huntly is just the woman for that kind of thing, she is so resourceful and full of tact."

CHAPTER V

The Face at the Window

ALL through the previous winter Joan had worked at Lady Huntly's little hospital in Birmingham. At the beginning of the war Lady Huntly, who was a widow, had fitted up her handsome house at Moorside as a V.A.D. hospital with twenty beds. Every bit of the service was voluntary, except in the cases of two surgical nurses. The parlour-maid, for three days a week, was the daughter of a duke. The cook was a lady with a M.A. degree, and two of the ward-maids were in private life quite famous artists. Joan was under kitchen-maid at first, going to the hospital for three days a week. But for three months before coming to Swanton she had served for six days a week, in order to earn the time for her holiday, and during that spell she had been promoted to the position of head kitchen-maid, because the cook could trust her to wash the saucepans clean. Joan had loved the bustle and rush of the work. She had been so happy in the companionship of those with whom she worked, that even the dirty work and the drudgery could not quench her enthusiasm. Now to

hear that Lady Huntly was going to Salonika was an absolute blow. Really, life was hard on Joan at this particular time! Just at this moment she felt that it would be a relief if she could rush away somewhere by herself, and have a good cry because things were so contrary.

Nancy was just bubbling over with talk and laughter of the most inconsequent sort. Joan had to give attention, to say yes and no at the proper times; yet all the while she was straining her ears to find out what Mrs. Pringle was saying to her mother. The talk between them had dropped into a lower and more serious key; their heads were closer together, and only a word here and there was audible.

Seeing her mother so absorbed, Joan busied herself with the teacups. She saw that her father had the kind of cake he liked best, and that Nancy did not want for chocolates; but all the time she was trying to catch the drift of that talk between the two mothers who sat so close together on the wide couch.

"Really, we must be going!" exclaimed Mrs. Pringle, starting up with evident reluctance. "Nancy, are you ready? Mrs. Haysome will be thinking we are intending to take up our abode here, by the way we have been hanging on. But it has been a truly delightful visit."

"We have been very glad to see you, and I hope you will come again very soon," said Mrs. Haysome hospitably.

"We should love to, but our summons home may come any day now, and so we may not be able to get over before we go north again. You will be sure to spare dear Joan to us for next Monday though, for it will not be possible for us to get away from Castle Friars before Tuesday, and we may as well have the best holiday that we can manage." Mrs. Pringle was shaking hands with her hostess in the most cordial fashion imaginable while she spoke, and then she walked out to her car with Mr. Haysome, while Joan followed behind with Nancy.

"Mother wants to have a day in the New Forest among the pigs and the acorns," said Nancy. "And she wants you to come too, because she says you are one of the best holiday-makers that she knows."

"I shall love to come," replied Joan. There was a fervent note in her tone which showed how much she meant what she said.

When Monday came, Joan had a wire from Mrs. Pringle asking her to take the train from Swanton, because the car had broken down and they could not send for her. At Castle Friars, which was the next station, she was joined by Mrs. Pringle and Nancy, who appeared to be in high spirits, and not at all upset by the failure of the car.

"Of course it is better going by car in some respects," said Mrs. Pringle. "But there is always pleasure in the unexpected, and one never knows who one may

meet in a crowded train. The awful isolation of one's own car is a bit wearing at times—at least I find it so.”

“Yes,” assented Joan, but with an unconvinced air. She would have been so glad if her father would have set up a car, that it seemed to her that she would never grumble about the isolation of it; but Mrs. Pringle was a little given to breaking out in unexpected places.

The trains were not very crowded this morning, and all the way to the New Forest the three had a compartment to themselves. Nancy withdrew into a book, but Mrs. Pringle and Joan sat side by side talking of the scenery, and of anything else that came into their minds.

“Joan, you are a very fortunate girl to have such a mother,” Mrs. Pringle said presently. She had been talking a minute before of the beneficial results of high culture in mothers on the next generation, so at first her words seemed a little bewildering, for Mrs. Hay-some certainly did not make any pretensions to high culture.

“I am quite sure that I am,” answered Joan, and now there was no lack of conviction in her tone. “Only, I am afraid that I do not always value her at her true worth. We have never had to do without her, you see, so we do not understand her value by force of contrast.”

“I hope it will be very long before you do have to do without her,” said Mrs. Pringle, with the deep note

in her voice that was there when she felt greatly about anything. "Do you know, Joan, I have been thinking how good it would have been for Nancy to have had a mother like yours."

"But Nancy has you!" cried Joan, and the admiration in her tone was very flattering; but there was actual sadness in Mrs. Pringle's voice now.

"Yes, Nancy has me. But for real motherhood I am nowhere in it with your mother, Joan. I haven't the depth of character nor the capacity for self-denial that your mother has. If Nancy grows into a true good woman it won't be so much from force of example as from force of contrast. The real mother is the woman who is so absorbed in her motherhood that she has no life apart from it. I have always regarded motherhood as an incident, or a detail separate from the centre of my being, and my child has had to suffer."

"Mother, Mother, there is a drove of pigs yonder; you ought to be happy now!" called out Nancy, who had come out of her book and was looking out of the window. Mrs. Pringle crossed to her side, and Joan followed. The drove of pigs was a big one, and all the animals seemed desperately afraid of the train. In laughing at their awkward rushes to get away, all trace of seriousness dropped from Mrs. Pringle's manner. But the gravity of her mood and her earnest words about Mrs. Haysome had had a mighty effect on Joan. All through that day she was thinking of her mother,

and making resolves to give her a more beautiful devotion in future.

"How strange that I, an ignorant little stupid, should ever have dared to think Mother homely and uncultured, while a brilliantly clever woman like Mrs. Pringle feels that she is the very embodiment of all that is noblest in a woman!" Joan was taking herself to task in this fashion all day, and, truth to tell, she was looking at Mrs. Pringle in quite a new light too.

It was a very pleasant day. It was a relief to be away from home for a while. The presence of the sick man at The Beacon did oppress Joan. What she had done for him in getting him out of his dangerous predicament on the undercliff was quite lost sight of in her own mind by the remembrance of the trouble she had brought to him by not being more prompt in going to see to the safe keeping of his papers. Every time she went past his door, and heard him moan; every time her mother came down saying that Mr. Standish was no better, she had the feeling that it was all her fault, and that, but for her, the poor man might have been well on the road to recovery by now.

A day right away from the house and from any reminder of the worry did a great deal for Joan. By evening she was feeling actually light-hearted again, and able to face anything. Of course, she was tired. She and her companions had tramped for miles, they had struggled through thickets of bracken, they had been

caught by blackberry trails, and they were untidy as they could be. Unfortunately they missed by ten minutes the fast train that would have taken them back to Swanton in comfort, and were forced to travel by the slow, which stopped at every station all the way from the centre of the forest to the sea. At Pondley Junction there was quite a long wait. Then, when their patience was so nearly at an end that Mrs. Pringle and Nancy were discussing seriously the possibility of hiring a motor from somewhere to take them home, the train slowly drew out of the station on the down line, while a long train from Weygate came creaking and groaning into the station on the up line.

Both trains were moving so slowly that Joan, sitting next to the window, could see very clearly into the carriages of the other train. She was staring into the window of a third-class smoker, when a man sitting there suddenly turned his head and looked in her direction.

She gave a great start, and sprang to her feet. The man who had turned his head was Robert Forbes, who had stolen the papers belonging to John Standish. She was sure of it, absolutely positive, for she had seen quite plainly the mark of the scar on his forehead.

"My dear Joan, are you ill? What is the matter?" cried Mrs. Pringle in dismay, for Joan's mouth was working. She was tumbling out her words with eager haste, trying to make herself understood, yet so inco-

herent that her listeners could not understand what it was that she wished to tell them.

"It is the man, the man who took the papers! I saw him so clearly. I must stop the train. I must! Do you understand?" and in her blind eagerness Joan began reaching up to fumble for the communication cord.

"No, no, you must not do that!" cried Mrs. Pringle sharply, signing to Nancy, who promptly pulled Joan down on to the seat again.

"I must stop the train; I must, or the man will get away. Please can't you understand that I have seen the man who stole the papers from Mr. Standish?" Joan was striving desperately hard for self-control, but she was trembling violently, and try as she would she did not seem able to think clearly.

"There was a person in the train that has just passed, whom you want stopped?" said Mrs. Pringle, sitting down beside Joan and holding her hands. "Now, be sensible, child. If you pull the communication cord here, the train will come to a stand, and the officials will come here to see what is the matter. They won't be very pleased about the matter, and they certainly will not pull back into Pondley Junction, because that was a London train, and will already be on its way again. They will go on to Stumpington Lea, which is our next stop. But we shall be so much later in getting there, every official will have as it were his teeth into you. They may even make you pay the fine,

holding that you were not justified in stopping the train; and every passenger will be curious to know your business. If you will just wait patiently for five or six minutes more, we shall arrive at Stumpington Lea. You can get out of the train and go straight to the telegraph office. You can wire to have the train searched for the man you want, and you will have saved much time, as well as sparing yourself the most unpleasant notoriety."

There was no getting past the common sense of Mrs. Pringle's utterances. Joan felt the wisdom of it all, even while she fairly writhed at the delay. Five or six minutes to reach Stumpington Lea. Why, it seemed at least an hour before they crawled into the little wayside station, the platform of which was crowded with people going home from some local festivity.

"There, Joan, take my purse, and get your wires off as quickly as you can. Nancy will go with you, and I will do my best to hold up the train. If they won't wait, why we must just make the best of it," said Mrs. Pringle; and then, as the train stopped with a jerk, she opened the door and fairly pushed Joan out to the platform, and into the thick of the miscellaneous crowd of mothers, babies, bundles and baskets, which lumbered the platform from end to end.

Joan stumbled and floundered through the confusion as best she might. Nancy was close behind her, but in spite of the most active efforts precious minutes were

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lost before the station-master was found, the matter explained, and telegrams sent warning the railway police of the presence of the suspected man in the London train. By this time the down train had drawn out of the station. It could not be held up.

Mrs. Pringle came rather wearily into the telegraph office, and sat down on the one chair the place contained. "Are you through with the wiring, Joan dear?" she asked in her sweetest tones; but there was a quality of patient endurance in her manner that Joan was quick to feel, and truth to tell, to resent. Of course it was tiresome for Mrs. Pringle to be held up like this on her homeward journey; but that was a very small and insignificant detail compared with what Joan was called upon to bear because of having seen the man who had stolen the papers.

"Wires have been sent to Pondley Junction, to Southampton, and to London. What more can be done?" Joan's tone was more than a trifle dreary, for the prospect did not seem very hopeful. It was possible the man might have left the train at Pondley Junction. Or he might not be the individual who had stolen the papers, but merely like him.

"You can do nothing more, I should say." Mrs. Pringle permitted herself a tiny sigh of resignation, then became resolutely cheerful. "I think you had better send a wire to your mother to say we are held up here, and that you will probably not be home until late. Then

we will go and see if we can find anything in the shape of a meal. It will never do to starve while we are spy-hunting, and I am beginning to feel as if I shall soon become emaciated from want of food."

"I am hungry too; but really, Mum, it is rather a lark, only I would rather not be in poor old Joan's shoes if she succeeds in running down her man," put in Nancy with a gay little laugh.

Her words brought a new terror to Joan. She had not thought of the possible consequences to herself if this German spy became aware that she was on his track. Of course she would be marked at once. Notoriety of the most unpleasant sort would be her portion. There might even be danger for her. Oh, why had she been dragged into a business so unfortunate? Her own fault, of course. She ought to have done the errand that was set for her, without lingering over it. Whatever she might have to suffer would only serve her right for not doing her duty in the first place.

"I shall stick it, of course," she muttered to herself, as she finished writing the wire to her mother, and handed it in. Then she went with Mrs. Pringle and Nancy to the old-fashioned inn near the station, where they had a sort of high tea, commencing with ham and poached eggs, meandering on through a bewildering variety of cakes and scones, blackberry jam and honey, and ending up with bowls of wild strawberries and a great dish of cherries.

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"What a delightful meal!" cried Nancy, who was in high spirits because the day was ending up with something which looked like a real adventure. "A feed of this sort is far more to be desired than the most ornate dinner I have ever been to. How are we going to get home, Mum, or do we stay here all night? Breakfast would be a feast to look forward to in such a case."

"Oh, we must go back," replied Mrs. Pringle. "There is the last train. If we cannot get away by that, I shall have to hunt for a motor; but I fancy the train will be possible, for, of course, the telegraph office will close by the time the train goes, so it will be of no use to wait here any longer. Now we will walk across to the station to see if there is any reply to the wires Joan has sent off."

The clerk told them that several messages were waiting, and Joan seized upon the brown envelopes, feeling that it was her day of fate. How her fingers trembled as she tore the flimsy paper!

All the answers were to the same effect; no man answering to her description had been found on the London train. The wire from Pondley Junction said that no passengers had left the train there, so Joan's day of fate came to a very tame ending, and she reached home, feeling that she had blundered hopelessly.

CHAPTER VI

Joan's Hard Bit

NO one could have realized more clearly than Joan did that she had blundered again, and pretty hopelessly too. Oh, it was hateful to be a failure—and such a failure! All the pride in her rose in revolt. There was resentment too. She was angry in her heart with the man who so innocently had brought all this humiliation upon her. But for him she could have been happy, as she used to be. At this point in her thinking she pulled herself up with a jerk, for the honesty of her nature compelled her to admit that she had not been happy in the past, just because her pride was always getting a hurt of some sort.

Mr. Haysome was not at home when she got back, and Mrs. Haysome looked too worn to be worried with outside things, so Joan carried the burden of her trouble to bed, and then forgot it for a while in sleep, for she was too healthy and also too tired to be kept awake by her self-reproach and misery.

She was astir betimes in the morning, and finding her

father alone, poured out the story of yesterday's happenings to him, as was her wont.

"Would it not have been better to have stopped the train, Father?" she demanded with some heat, when she had finished telling him of those futile wires, and all the delay and discomfort that had resulted from the sending of them.

Mr. Haysome shook his head. He was looking grave and rather worried. He hated the idea of Joan being mixed up in a thing of this sort. He kept wanting to remind her, too, that all the trouble had been of her own bringing. The effort he made to repress this quite natural desire was costing him a lot in self-control, and he was not a patient man by any means. "I am glad that Mrs. Pringle would not let you stop it; there would only have been more trouble. You have the satisfaction of knowing that the man is still in England, and so it may be possible to run him to earth yet, though I will admit the prospect is not hopeful."

"Shall I have to tell Mr. Standish about it?" Joan asked, with a feeling of dismay at her heart.

"Not until he is fit to bear it, of course," answered her father. "But certainly he will have to know by and by. At present the main thing is to get him well enough to bear more trouble later on."

"It does not sound a cheerful prospect," she answered shortly. Then she carried her sore heart off to the town, where she did errands for her mother, helped

Amy to choose a new bathing-dress, and finally ran in to the old house in the High Street to see Aunt Mary, and to get a little sympathy for herself if she could.

It was more than a week later before she came face to face with the man who was being cared for in her father's house. He had asked for her continually. Indeed, he might be said to be constantly demanding her presence. But doctor and nurses had decreed that Joan was too exciting for him at this time, and so she must be kept away from the sick-room. This would have suited Joan perfectly, had it not been for the burden of regret she carried because she had failed to secure the seizure of the thief when she had seen him in the moving train.

Quite contrary to the expectations of his doctor and nurses, John Standish was making a rapid recovery. There was a grim determination about him which would not let him be crushed by these adverse blows of fate. He was not a failure—he was a victim. As a sick man he could do nothing to put matters right. When he was well again it would be different, then he would be his own man, and capable of fighting for himself. Hence his first business was to get well. When that was accomplished, the rest might be comparatively easy.

It was when John Standish was really creeping up to convalescence that Joan's greatest discomfort began. With the invalid being brought downstairs and assisted to a luxurious lounging chair on the lawn, it was quite

impossible for her, as a daughter of the house, to be always absent from the circle that gathered round him. Amy and the boys were his devoted slaves, ready to fetch and carry, to do anything and everything he required. Joan could not very well stand aloof. One day when the boys were for the moment absent, and Amy was chasing a stray dog from the garden, the invalid let fall a book that he had been pretending to read. Joan hurried forward to pick it up, and then was dismayed at the chilly manner in which her overture was received.

"Thank you, Miss Haysome, but I do not really need to have the thing picked up; I dropped it because I was tired of it."

"I am sorry; perhaps it was not interesting. Pray let me get you another." Joan stood in readiness to run this errand with as much alacrity as the others would have done.

"Thank you, I would rather not trouble you," he replied languidly, then turned his head to look at the sparkle of blue water in Durling Bay.

Joan was stung into impulsive speech, very indiscreet speech it was, too. "You mean that you will not let me do anything for you, because of the way in which I blundered," she flashed out hotly.

He lifted his head with an impatient movement, but when he spoke his tone was strictly on the defensive. "Is it wonderful that I should not choose to give you

trouble, when you remember how averse you were to taking trouble for me in the past?"

This, after she had torn her hands to bits, and slaved with all her might to pull him out from under that landslide on Durling undercliff. Poor Joan! A stream of indignant words rose to her lips, but they were not uttered, for at that moment Amy rushed up to say that the doctor was coming in at the gate, and so Joan made good her escape. She was much too humiliated and angry to risk an encounter with the doctor just then. Passing in through the house, she snatched her hat from a peg of the hat-stand, then fled out by the kitchen entrance and took her way to the town.

She was going to the house in the High Street, in the hope that she might find her Aunt Mary free enough to talk to her for five minutes. Mrs. Mark Lewis always seemed to have balm for sore spots, and she always said the thing that was most comforting.

"Of course I deserve it all—yes, and a lot more added on to it," she murmured to herself, and then her hurrying feet came to a halt at the end of the lane, she stopped short, then turned round. "No, I won't go and whine about my afflictions to Aunt Mary, who must have enough bothers of her own just now. I will go back and face things. It is only cowards who run away."

Brave words; but she had to wince many times that day, and in the days that followed. John Standish

would accept no service at her hands if he could avoid it. Indeed, his one ambition at this time might be said to consist in doing without her help in whatever form it might be offered. To a girl of Joan's temperament this was so intensely galling, that it was only her pride and grim resolution that enabled her to bear it.

The boys and Amy had planned a second expedition to the caves. At the last moment, just as they were starting, Amy, plunging recklessly down the veranda steps, slipped, hurting her knee rather badly, and at first it seemed as if the expedition would be off. Then Joan, seeing the disappointment on the faces of the boys, and having been made sympathetic through her own need and longing for sympathy, volunteered to take Amy's place.

"But you will want us to behave properly, to walk in the middle of the path, and never to raise our voices above a whisper," objected Fred, who was twelve, and larky, always up to mischief of some sort, and mostly coming to grief over it.

"Shut up!" admonished Tom, who was older, and who had caught sight of a look in Joan's eyes that made him feel sorry for her. Then he turned to his sister: "It will be ripping if you come, Joan. Quite tophole, in fact. Are you ready, or must we wait?"

"Oh, I guess that I am ready enough," she answered, suppressing a very natural desire to go and change her frock for one that might be more suitable.

It was a long walk to the caves, and the afternoon was very hot. There was burning sun, shimmering light reflected from the water, and smell of scorched dry grass on the rocky heights above the cliff path. From this they plunged downward by a steep slope, and were at once in dense darkness. Ah, it was thrilling! Joan stumbled along in the rear. The boys, who knew the way from having been before, had gone ahead in happy confidence, forgetting that the place was strange to her. Then she heard voices close to her, a party of sightseers were coming up from below, and their cheerful voices sounded wonderfully reassuring.

"My daughter wants to go out to Salonika with her V.A.D.," said a comfortable motherly voice close to Joan, although the speaker was invisible. "I think I shall let her go, too. We are compelled to send our boys into the danger zone, so why should our girls be withheld? We do not love our daughters better than our sons."

"It is horrible out there for women, so I have heard from ever so many quarters," replied another voice.

"Of course it is," said the first speaker. "But don't you think that the girls want to do their bit as well as the boys? The harder the work the greater the patriotism. A girl should have her opportunity, and she may be trusted to rise to it."

Joan gave a little gasp, then hung on to the rocky side of the tunnel for support. It was as if that chance



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"JOAN WAS DISMAIED AT THE CHILLY WAY IN WHICH
HER OVERTURE WAS RECEIVED"

encounter with those people in the dark had given her her marching orders. In a flash there came back to her what Mrs. Pringle had said about Lady Huntly's V.A.D. going out to Salonika. If this was settled then she would go with it. Oh, yes, she would, for she would tell her mother what this other mother had said, the girls should have an equal chance with the boys. More than anything Joan longed to show her patriotism; so far, her efforts in that direction had only resulted in a hopeless blundering—in fact, by her want of zeal in doing her duty she had played into the hands of the enemy. Now, things were going to be altered. But at this moment Joan, creeping forward round the angle of the tunnel, came into the light again, she had reached the caves which opened seawards. She had reached something else too, the turning-point in her life, only just at first she did not realize how great was the decision that she had taken.

CHAPTER VII

Roughing It

“WORD has come through that they are sending us sixty men, and we have only room for twenty—whatever shall we do?” Lady Huntly’s voice had a shrill note in it, her face had a harassed look, and her manner was flurried, as she came to the little room just inside the great gate of the courtyard, where the Sister-in-charge had set up her head-quarters.

“Why, of course we must do the very best we can,” replied the sister cheerfully; and then she asked when the wounded were to be expected. This Lady Huntly did not know. The message was of the briefest; it was not even known at what time the consignment of suffering humanity might be expected to arrive.

“There will be scarcely room for them to lie on the floors,” complained Lady Huntly. She was suffering herself at the thought of how those poor fellows would have to suffer from lack of accommodation and the ordinary comforts of life.

“At least they can be kept warm and dry,” answered the sister briskly. She had a cheerful way of looking

at the best side of things, and she was not going to be daunted if she could help it. "I shall have to call the kitchen staff to help me get ready for the men. The nurses have enough to do already. Nurse Moira is seedy, I have sent her off duty for twelve hours. Nurse Kate ought to have a rest too. She was on duty all night, and she must be ready for a call later in the day."

Lady Huntly nodded, then went off again. Her work was sufficiently arduous. Having told the sister what was in store for them, she went back to her own special work, only pausing, as she passed the entrance to the long wide kitchen, to give the staff a hint of warning concerning what might be expected of them.

The house had been of some pretensions once, but it had fallen into lamentable decay. There was a gaping rent in the roof of the kitchen that had been mended temporarily by having a piece of corrugated iron laid above it, and kept in place by great lumps of rock.

There was a big table formed from packing-cases standing in the middle of the room, and at this table stood Joan Haysome hard at work scouring tinware. She was wearing a blue cotton frock and a big apron of coarse material. There was no romance of any sort about the work, nor the uniform, but Joan was looking as if she greatly enjoyed it, and she turned a bright face to greet Lady Huntly.

"Don't they shine? I feel a proud satisfaction in

being able to produce so much brilliance." As she spoke, Joan held up a couple of tin wash bowls, so that the effect might be duly noted. Then catching sight of the trouble on Lady Huntly's face, her own became immediately sympathetic. "Is anything the matter, dear Lady Huntly? Or are you unwell?"

"There is a hard bit in front of us, and I am concerned that we should be ready for it," replied the lady, smiling a little. The sympathy on the face of Joan did help tremendously. Tight places would not seem straitly uncomfortable all the time she had so much of consolation from her staff of workers.

"Where is Cook?" she asked, after she had put Joan in possession of the facts. Joan began to laugh. One had to look at the funny side of things in these days of strain, or really the life would seem unbearable. It was only three days since two huge army lorries had deposited the bundles and bags of Lady Huntly's V.A.D. equipment at the gate of the courtyard, and already the place was in trim to receive its first consignment of wounded men. It was thanks to the energetic efforts of the kitchen staff, helped out by a small army of orderlies, that this result had been come at.

"Cook is chasing your dinner round the back of the walls," Joan answered, her eyes shining with fun. "That stupid orderly brought a chicken in, which he said he had killed. He asked for string to tie its legs. There was not any available, except a bit of wool from

an unravelled sock. This was used, the legs were tied, and the bird was hung up. The next thing we knew was that the chicken had come to life again, had kicked its legs free, and gone for a stroll on its own account. The orderly was not to be found, so Cook went in chase. When she comes back we are going to toss up to see who shall give the miserable creature its happy dispatch."

"I think it will have a day longer of life. We have no time to spare for preparing poultry for table," said Lady Huntly as she turned away. "It is not a time to be thinking of ourselves; a cup of tea and a biscuit will be all that I shall require."

Joan laughed softly as she finished her pans. Lady Huntly might talk of being satisfied with fare of that sort, but there was not a member of the staff who would have been content for her to be so little cared for. When the pans were all done, Joan ranged them along a shelf that ran along one side of the kitchen, then turned to the next bit of work that was waiting for her.

It was still very much of a dream to her that she had really come out to Salonika, and had been dumped with the rest of the hospital equipment in the marshy ground wide of Lake Betchik. When she had at first begged her father and mother to consent to her volunteering for service abroad with Lady Huntly's staff, Mr. and Mrs. Haysome would not hear of it. Then Mr. Haysome,

wiser than his wife, suddenly realized something of what Joan was bearing in her proud reserve, and, finding his way to her confidence just because of his sympathy with her, discovered that her happiness was bound up in hard work for her country, and at once told her she might go. Mrs. Haysome came round then; she usually did when her husband set her the example. So Joan got the desire of her heart, and was allowed to enrol herself on the staff in the humble capacity of kitchen worker. The weeks at Swanton were only a memory now, for The Beacon had been given up, and the whole family had gone back to Birmingham at the beginning of the autumn. Since then life had been a rush and a bustle. Then had come the voyage, but even that had not been restful, because of the violent sea-sickness which had made her its victim.

She came to the door of the kitchen when Lady Huntly hurried away, and stood looking out for just a moment of breathing space before going back to her work. She had never before been out of England. For the moment she seemed very far away from home and from all that home held. What were they doing in Birmingham at this moment, she wondered. Then her thought went from Birmingham to that temporary home at The Beacon, at Swanton, and she shivered as she thought of all the humiliation that had come to her there. But she was going to make good. Not for always was she going to sit down under the cloud on

her self-respect. It was the thought of the reproaches of John Standish that was uppermost in her mind as she went back to her work, and the sting of the memory made her carry her head so high, that an orderly, who was coming from the kitchen with a bucket of pigwash, thought hard thoughts about the pride of well-to-do girls who came out to do their work for love instead of money.

Lady Huntly's V.A.D. was perched in the fold of a wooded hill overlooking a plain. Beyond that plain a line of hills rose steeply to the skyline, and the tops of those hills were already white with the first snows of winter. Joan wondered whether later on the plain would be snow-covered too, but on that point she could get no definite information. No one about the place seemed to have lived there for more than a few weeks, most of them had only been there a few days. There was an ancient donkey which drew up water from the well, but unlike Balaam's ass it had shown no tendency to speech thus far.

The cook arrived presently. She was short of breath, and she had not secured the fowl, but she had met the orderly whom Joan had just passed at the kitchen entrance, and she had ordered him to find her either that fowl or another. She had given a further order to make sure that it was properly dead before he ventured on bringing it into the kitchen. When she heard Joan's news about the wounded who were shortly expected,

she rose to the occasion in a manner that was entirely worthy of her.

"I must make another batch of bread straight away," she said. "There is no time to send to head-quarters for a supply, and the poor fellows may be half-starved. But, Joan dear, you had better go and help the nurses. I would rather have you than that feather-pated Miss Gregory; but you will be of so much more use in the wards, so I will sacrifice myself."

Away went Joan. She had been in the kitchen ever since she had risen from her bed, so it was a huge relief to run up the wide old stairs that wound up from the flagged hall to the floor above. A strange old house it was. There was a state apartment, where the master of the house had been wont to receive his guests when he had any. There were the rooms where he had kept his wives tucked away out of sight of the world, and there were the tiny chambers given over to servants or to stores, or for any other use which might have arisen. These tiny rooms were the despair of the Sister-in-charge. She could only get a single cot in many of them, how was one night nurse to overlook properly half a dozen rooms? The place was so old, too, and the rats ran about in broad daylight. Joan met an impudent grey-whiskered veteran as she went along the narrow passage leading to what had been the women's rooms. A month ago she would have shrieked at the sight, but one did not give way to petty terrors of this kind when up,

against the really serious things of life, so she shooed the patriarch back to his hole behind the wainscot, and sped onwards to the room where she was most wanted.

There was hurrying and scurrying to and fro, much carrying of beds and blankets, but it was orderly bustle. Lady Huntly worked by the side of Joan, taking her orders from the Sister-in-charge in the most matter-of-fact way. She might be the head of affairs herself, but she had sufficient common sense to be willing to defer to those whose knowledge of detail was greater than her own.

The day wore on to evening. Everything at the little hospital was as ready as hands could make it, but as yet no wounded had arrived, nor any message regarding them. The tired kitchen staff had gone back to their own department, and were getting a welcome rest after their toils, when one of the nurses came running down the stairs to ask that an orderly might be sent to fetch the doctor, who had gone over to the huts about two miles away, where a part of a battalion was resting at the back of the lines.

"I do not believe that there is an orderly about just now, but I will go and see," said the cook; and she went out by a side door to the olive yard that stretched from the house to the river. Joan was busy preparing supper for the nurses, and went straight on with her work, while the nurse who had come down dropped on to a bench near by.

"Oh, I feel so dreadfully ill!" she said, and her pinched white face bore testimony to the truth of her words. "Nurse Moira is ill; Sister thinks it is malaria, and I believe she is awfully worried, for she is making all sorts of little jokes, and that is what she never does unless something unusually bad is going on. Oh dear, oh dear, I should like to go to bed for a fortnight, and to feel that no one even wanted me to get up!"

"I don't think that I should like to go to bed for so long, and I certainly should not like to think that it made no difference to anyone whether I got up or not." Joan laughed as she spoke. Well she knew her weak point, and that it was an actual necessity of life to her that someone should want her.

The cook came back to say that no orderly was on hand, but she had found a Vlach (as the Highland shepherds were called), and he had promised to carry the message for her. To make sure of its being delivered the cook had scrawled a few words on a bit of paper torn from an ovaltine canister, then had wrapped the message round a big onion, which she gave to the man.

Then the nurse turned to go upstairs again, but she reeled, and would have fallen if Joan had not swung out a ready arm and caught her as she swayed.

"I think, I really think that you will get your fortnight in bed," she said, speaking cheerfully, for of course the poor thing had to be heartened up somehow.

"Oh, I can't go to bed!" cried the nurse in a shocked tone. "I must just get the doctor to give me a pick-me-up of some sort when he comes to Nurse Moira. Just think of what we have in front of us with all those wounded expected in at any moment."

Joan gave a little gasp of dismay. She had forgotten for the moment what was in front of them. If two nurses were ill, that only left one nurse and the Sister to do the nursing. Lady Huntly always helped where she could, working as hard as or harder than anyone, but she was not a trained nurse, and so her work was not of so much value. The kitchen staff were always ready to help in any emergency, no matter how pressing the needs of their own department, but their help also did not count much for the very same reason.

Joan helped the nurse upstairs and along the passage to what had been the women's rooms. It was getting dark, the passage was unlighted save for the candle carried by Joan, and the grey rats scuttled from under her feet as she went. The nurse, whose nerves were unstrung, uttered little moans and cries of fear, but Joan held her with a firmer clasp, and so they passed into the first of the queer little chambers, and on through that to the room the two nurses shared.

Nurse Moira was in bed, lying with closed eyes, and moaning. The Sister had gone away to fetch something, and, as there was no one else to help, Joan commenced to undress Nurse Kate, who protested feebly

that she was on duty, and dared not lie down without permission.

"Very well," said Joan, with a patience born of hospital discipline, "sit down on your bed and rest. I will go and find Sister, then she will tell you whether you are fit to be on duty any longer. Please don't try to move or you will fall down."

A little moan of pain was the only answer Nurse Kate made to this, and Joan went away, stumbling over the high step outside the door, and only saving herself from falling by catching at an angle in the crazy wall, so bringing down a shower of rotten chunks of plaster, and so much dust that she was nearly choked.

"I must sweep it up before I call Sister," she murmured, then fled to the cupboard on the upper landing, which she herself had helped to stock with brooms and brushes for the use of the ward-maid. But it had been a day of upheaval, and the ward-maid, had had considerable use for brooms and brushes, and had not put them back in their places. Finally, Joan had to rush downstairs for the necessary things, then, having swept up the rubbish, started anew to find the Sister, whom she finally ran to earth in Lady Huntly's private room.

"If you please, I am afraid that Nurse Kate is ill," said Joan, speaking to the Sister with the deference due from the kitchen staff. "I have helped her to her room, and I wanted to help her into bed, but she asked me to report to you, as she is on duty."

"I will come at once," replied the Sister, speaking in the "miles apart" tone she always used to inferiors; then she turned to Lady Huntly with a note of real tragedy in her voice: "Was anything more ghastly ever? That is the second nurse in three hours, and those poor fellows expected at midnight!"

"It looks pretty bad, but I expect we shall get through somehow." Lady Huntly's tone was so easy and calm that Joan, listening to it, felt a sudden wave of courage as she stood by the door waiting to see if there were any further orders for her to carry out.

"We *must* get through." There was a hard decisive ring in the tone of the nursing sister. She might be dismayed, she was certainly not broken. Then she turned to Joan, issuing short sharp commands, her manner more distant than ever: "Tell Cook we have had a message to warn us that we may expect the first batch of wounded by midnight. She must have plenty of hot water, and cocoa, and soup. She must also be prepared to let us have help, as we are short-handed. You look capable; tell her you are to be set free to help us, and please be wide-awake and fit for duty when the time comes. Give me your candle, I do not fancy going along that passage to the nurses' room without a light, there are too many rats."

Joan handed her the candle, and retired kitchen-wards. It had been the dream of her life to be a nurse, to ease pain, and to be in a position of authority like

the Sister-in-charge. Now that she was faced with opportunity for training, whether she would or no, she was not a little dismayed; there was even in her secret heart a cowardly desire to run away. As running away was not possible just then, there was nothing for it save to put the best face she could on the situation, and to screw her courage to do the best she could when the time came.

CHAPTER VIII

Recognition

THERE had been a brush with the enemy somewhere out in the marshy country beyond Lake Betchik. Information was not very clear as to where it had been. No one seemed very clear either as to when it had taken place. Orderlies, passing to and fro between Lady Huntly's V.A.D. and the district head-quarters, brought conflicting statements as to the time, some of them stating that the affair had come about a week ago, that the wounded had been first-aided in the tents near the firing-line, and were now being moved farther back, because the tents were wanted in another direction. On top of this pronouncement came another, which stated that fighting was even now in progress, that the guns could be plainly heard at head-quarters, and that the men were being brought to the V.A.D. just as they were picked up from the field. A telephone wire between the hospital and head-quarters was broken down by a gale of wind on the previous night, and it had not yet been repaired, so messages had to be carried to and fro by motor-cycle over a road which begged description.

Oh, the strain of that waiting! The two nurses were so ill that the rest of the nursing staff had to give them attention, instead of taking the rest they needed so badly for themselves. One doctor remained at the hospital ready to attend to the cases as they were brought in, but the other had gone forward to meet the wounded, in response to an urgent message that had reached the hospital about nine o'clock in the evening.

Joan, healthily tired with the work of the day, was so sleepy that it seemed impossible to keep her eyes open. She sat on one end of the big table in the kitchen leaning against a big bucket filled with potatoes, which a staff-orderly had scrubbed for her earlier in the evening. In spite of the bravest determination she fell asleep presently, but being acutely uncomfortable she began to dream, and was in fancy back on the Durling undercliff, and trying to rescue the unfortunate man who had been buried by the landslide. Oh, how she toiled and strove! She dreamed that the perspiration was running down her face, her hands were scratched and bleeding, and her limbs ached with a dreadful dragging pain. She was pulling and tugging to free the man, then suddenly something gave way with a jerk and she tumbled over, waking in a hurry as her head bumped against the side of the potato bucket, and she discovered that her struggles were only a dream.

What was that? Through the silence of the night came the sound of a creaking rumble. She had heard

it before during the days since she had come to live in this wild country place; it was the noise made by the clumsy carts, springless, and with heavy wheels, which the farmers used for the transport of produce across the rough and practically roadless country. One cart, two—why, there must be a round dozen of them judging from the noise that was made by the heavy rumbling wheels.

She slipped from the table and stood erect, her hands tightly clasped, her face as white as paper. That noise of wheels meant that the wounded were coming, they were being brought in those rude jolting carts. A feeling of absolute panic seized upon Joan; she had no courage for the sights she might be called upon to see. Oh, she could not bear it, she could not! It was for the kitchen staff that she had volunteered. There were no dreadful sights there, except, indeed, when some poor fowl had to be given swift and merciful dispatch.

Then she remembered her miserable blundering at Swanton, and how she had volunteered for this hard work in order that she might make good. She was going to do it, too, no matter what the doing might cost. The thought of it ran through her veins like some elixir. The colour came back to her face, and the strength to her limbs. She walked across the kitchen with a quick, firm tread, and, opening the door that gave on the courtyard, stood on the threshold peering out at the night.

A broad band of silvery moonlight lay across the

courtyard, and the gnarled old olive-tree by the gate cast a weird distorted shadow on the open space beyond. The doctor had come out of the house by the front door and was walking away in the direction from which the sounds were heard. From where she stood by the kitchen door, Joan could see the other door quite plainly. Lady Huntly was there and the Sister, while orderlies ran hither and thither bringing out stretchers, and doing all the last things that remained to be done.

The first cart rumbled jolting into the yard, creaked over the deep rut by the horse trough, and drew up at the house door. Joan went forward then, in readiness for the first quick order from the Sister. She was ready now for what might come. Every nerve was strung to the extremest tension; she hardly knew what she expected to see, but she did know that she would not have been surprised if heads and limbs detached from bodies had rolled out of those heavy lumbering carts. There was a quick order from the doctor, and two of the field-ambulance men began to lift battered bodies from the cart. These were most of them stretcher cases, and they were carried into the wards straight away until all the beds were full. Still the carts kept rumbling up; there had been a blunder somewhere, and more of the wounded had been sent to Lady Huntly's hospital than could possibly be accommodated with any sort of comfort. But they had been riding in those heavily jolting carts since dawn, some of them had

been lying on the ground all through the previous night, and there was certainly no question of sending them on anywhere else.

The men not so badly wounded were sent into the kitchen, and there they sat on benches by the walls in dumb patience, waiting until their more unfortunate comrades had been attended to.

The cook and Joan were busy now. The wounds of the men in the kitchen were a very secondary consideration; the first thing to be done was to feed them, for they were literally starving. Mugs of cocoa, mugs of soup, great hunks of bread and cheese were disappearing as if by magic. Then Joan, who was running to and fro ministering to the famished men, discovered that one poor fellow, sitting right back in the corner by the saucepan-rack, had not touched his mug of soup, though he was holding it close to him, as if to get the smell of it, even if drinking was not possible. The lower part of his face was bound round with a thick woollen scarf, which was so caked with mud that he looked as if he had been lying in a swamp.

"Can't you drink your soup?" asked Joan. Her voice was very sympathetic, and she had hard work to keep the tears back, because the poor fellow looked so utterly forlorn and miserable. He made no reply, only looked at her with a dumb appeal in his eyes which made her feel as if she would cry out with the pain of it all; then the man sitting next to him spoke.

"He has got a broken jaw, miss, and a good few gashes on his head. He is a bit lame, too, and he should have been a stretcher case, only, seeing that he could manage to stand for just about two minutes when he was put on his feet, he had to be classed with the slightly wounded, and so got sent along with us. We were all within sight of starving, for we have not had a mouthful of anything since dawn; but I guess he has gone one better still, for I know that when we were having a bit passed along to set our teeth in before we started he couldn't open his mouth to take it."

"How very dreadful!" cried Joan, and her eyes grew wide and dark from sheer sympathy. "I will go and tell the Sister, then she will have him taken into the wards."

The man with a broken jaw made a motion of protest, and the comrade sitting next to him spoke again. It was plain there was plentiful understanding between the two who had fought side by side. "You had best leave him until the doctors have time to look him up, miss; they will do it as soon as they get a chance. Oh, you can trust them. We are not to say bad like some of the others, and it is a comfort just to sit under a roof where there is light and fire. It rained last night, and we were lying on the ground then; at least, those of us were that could not sit up. This is a fair picnic compared with that sort of thing."

The cook called for Joan at this moment, and she was

kept so busy for a space that she had no time to spare for the corner where sat the man with the broken jaw, still intently regarding the mug of steaming soup that he could not drink. Presently one of the doctors came down to the kitchen, and starting at one end of the patiently waiting men, began to overhaul them with quick fingers. There was no nurse in attendance; there was not one who could be spared. The cook and Joan and the flighty little Miss Gregory were pressed into service, and did their best. But Joan had taken two courses of lessons in first aid, and she proved of so much value from the point of understanding the doctor's orders that he kept her by his side to help him, while the other two were busy with tasks it was not easy to blunder over.

The turn of the man with the broken jaw came last. Joan lifted the mug of soup, now grown cold, from his mud-caked fingers, then she helped him on one side while another soldier helped him on the other, and so they got him to the doctor's table. Swiftly the doctor cut away the muddy scarf, then a layer of thick marsh mud had to be scraped away, and so at length the wound was laid bare, and the doctor was able to get to work in good earnest. He called to Joan to put her hand under the poor fellow's head, and from the position in which she stood she had a clear view of his face in the strong glare from the lamp on the table. She gave such a start of surprise then that she very nearly

dropped the man's head. The doctor gave her a sharp word of caution, but the involuntary groan that was wrung from the sufferer affected her far more acutely, and a stab of reproach at her heart steadied her. She was looking down into the face of John Standish, the man whom she had rescued from the landslide on the Durling undercliff, and who had been nursed back to life in her father's house. It was John Standish—she was sure of it. How she hoped that he would not recognize her! She had done him so much harm by her blundering that her greatest wish was for him to forget all about her, and the last thing she desired was that he should know her again.

The doctor was longer over this case than any other; by the time he had finished the man was so plainly near to collapse that the ambulance men were sent for, and he was carried away to one of the corridors upstairs. There was no bed to spare for him; he would have to lie on a mattress spread on the floor while the rats ran steeplechases over his body; but at least it was better than lying on the damp ground in the open, as he had done on the previous night.

There was no rest for Joan. The wounded men in the kitchen had to be attended to; she was understudy to the doctor; she was assistant to the cook; and when at length a hard-worked nurse came down to wash the men in the kitchen before they were sent off to sleep in the big shed at the back, she had to be assis-

tant to the nurse also. The mud was literally caked on the faces and hands of the men; their clothes were stiff with marsh mud, and, as the nurse said, it was scraping rather than washing that was necessary for them.

All through the bustle of running to and fro, of administering soup and cocoa, and helping to wash hands and faces, Joan was puzzling herself to know why John Standish should be serving in the army in the garb of a private soldier. She knew from what Aunt Mary had told her that he was a scientific man, and that he had been doing the work of a chemist in a munition factory. Naturally she had supposed that he would have the rank of an officer when he went into the army. But he was wearing just the usual clothes; there was no distinguishing mark about him that showed him to be any different from the ordinary rank-and-file man. Greatly she wondered what it all meant, and a vague sense of trouble stole over her, lest his position might be in any way the result of the loss of those papers.

Her speculations met with no very satisfactory result. The hours of the night wore on, the grey light of the tardy dawn crept over the high hills, and it was day once more. The kitchen staff snatched a rest between whiles, one or two at a time, as they could be spared, and then it was work again, hard and constant toil. The two nurses on the sick-list were very ill indeed. Malaria, the doctor said, and of a very bad type. The

old rat-ridden house did not stand in a healthy situation. It was roomy, and weather-proof, and it was crammed so full just now with suffering men that there was no question of even contemplating a move. Houses were far apart in that district, and a suitable shelter hard to find. They could not go into tents at this time of the year, for the rain was an everyday occurrence, and often there were snow showers.

The cook said she could manage very well with men helpers, and Joan could be set free to help with the nursing. The flighty Miss Gregory had also been pressed into service, and before evening came the house had settled into orderly quiet. Miss Gregory was in the wards working under the much-harassed night-nurse, but Joan had been put in charge of the two sick nurses, and her responsibility was very heavy. Three days passed almost like a dream. Twice a day the Sister came to inspect Joan's work. Once a day the doctor came, but for the rest Joan had to manage as best she could. An orderly fetched and carried for her, not by any means the same orderly. Sometimes it was one of the men attached to the regular staff, sometimes it was one of the men who had been wounded, but not too much hurt to be useful. One of these men was the soldier who had sat next to John Standish on the night when the carts had brought the wounded to the hospital. Joan liked him, he was so merry and cheerful, so ready to do things for her, and so understanding in



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"HE MADE NO REPLY, ONLY LOOKED AT HER WITH A
DUMB APPEAL IN HIS EYES"

the way in which he set about his work. He came up from the kitchen to collect the dirty crockery which Joan was piling on a tray outside the door, and she noticed how depressed he looked. His cap was drawn over his eyes, and his mouth was screwed to a pucker. He came slouching along the corridor with the tread of an old man, and she thought that his hurts must be troubling him more than usual.

"No, miss, thank you; I'm getting better fast. The doctor said last night that another week would see me through, and off the sick-list. It is Gentleman John that I'm bothered about; he isn't getting on, and I'm afraid he is going to hook it."

"Hook it?" Joan looked puzzled, and paused in the act of putting a couple of dirty basins down upon a pile of plates. Hook it, to her, signified running away, and she could not think where a man with a broken jaw would be likely to want to run, when he was comfortably placed in hospital.

"I'm afraid he is going to die," said the man with brief, and, to Joan, quite brutal directness. Then he went on with a savage note in his tone: "If I was in his shoes I should want to die too, and I wouldn't try to get better. Rotten he has been treated, and there ain't much to make him want to live."

"What do you mean?" Joan's tone was faint, her lips were dry, and her mouth felt parched. She stooped over the tray that stood on the floor, and hoped that

the soldier, whose name was Tom, would not notice how disturbed she was by this news concerning John Standish. But she must know more, and so she asked in a hard dry tone: "What do you mean by saying you would want to die if you were in his place? What has he done?"

"It isn't what he has done," replied Tom with an indignant snort, as he stooped to pick up a pile of dirty crockery to carry away to the kitchen. "From what I've seen of him I should say that he was white all through, and as straight as they make 'em. A swell he was, miss; one of the scientific blokes that invents poison gas, and all that sort of thing. He was very busy inventing a new stuff warranted to put men out of action in the least possible time, and yet not to kill them, when by some piece of carelessness he let a blooming German spy steal his papers, and not only his papers, but a lot of Government stuff with which he had been entrusted. He couldn't be court-martialled or punished in the ordinary way, but they wasn't going to let him off scot free, so they just drops him, they wouldn't look at his scientific work, they wouldn't look at him. Some men in his place would have gone over to the enemy after being treated rotten like that. Gentleman John just walked into the nearest recruiting place, and joined up as a private soldier, and no one would have known anything about what was behind, if one of the chaps in our battalion hadn't happened to

be an old chum of his, and he let out to the rest of us about it."

"Poor man, it was certainly very hard for him!" said Joan; then she turned back into the room where her patients lay and shut the door. She had heard enough, more than enough to make her heart ache for the remainder of the day. The wrong she had done by her want of thought, and her lack of promptness, was beyond her power to put straight. She had tried to forget all about it, and now it was being thrust right under her notice as it were, and she could not get away from it if she tried.

The nurses were a little better that day. Joan was able to give more attention to clearing up the sick-room, and putting the place tidy. As she went to and fro past a tiny loophole of a window that looked to the north, her ears caught the sound of distant thunder, or that was what she thought it was, until the orderly, who brought up the supper for her patients, told her it was guns, and that a rumour was going round of a big advance of the enemy.

CHAPTER IX

Getting Nearer

A STRANGE tremor shook Joan after the orderly had departed. That she should be so nearly in the circle of gun-fire brought home the real position of things with startling vividness. Her hands were shaking as she carried the tray with her patients' supper into the first of the two dark little rooms which were her especial domain of work and responsibility just now. It was with much ado that she kept her teeth from chattering. Oh, it was horrid to feel so cowardly, and to know in her secret heart that she was downright afraid!

Nurse Kate was very ill to-night. She could not touch any food, although she was constantly crying out for sips of water, and she talked in her delirium of grapes, and pears, and strawberries. Sometimes when that distant thunder sounded louder she would start up on her bed, crying out to Joan that the Germans were advancing on the hospital, and that nurses and patients alike would be killed. Her distress was quite piteous to see, and Joan tried hard to comfort and reassure her.

Then Nurse Moira, who had been lying very quiet,

began to talk and cry also. Joan was really distressed now on account of the nurses, for whom quiet was so essential. How could she keep them serene under this continual roar of big guns?

Finally, Joan shut that tiny window that looked to the north, and stuffing an army blanket up in front of it to deaden the sounds, she set to work to read her charges into peace and calm if she could. Both of the nurses were flushed with fever; both seemed to have their nerves on edge; and it was a long time before Joan, reading in slow, monotonous tones, had the satisfaction of seeing them begin to grow quieter, and presently fall asleep.

What a blessed lifting of strain that was! For a few minutes she leaned back in her chair, just content to enjoy the rest after her hours of work. Her own bed was in the next room. She was supposed to get her night's rest while her patients were sleeping. As a matter of fact, she had not been able to go to bed really and properly for several nights. She could not lie down to rest when the two were moaning and crying in delirium. It was only towards morning that they would sink into quiet slumber, and then it was nearly always time for Joan to be stirring to get the room spick and span, in readiness for the visit of the Sister-in-charge.

She was really too tired to get up from her chair and face the exertion of walking into the next room to lie down on her bed. The chair was not a particularly

comfortable one, but she was screwed into a restful angle, and before she realized it, she was dozing like her patients.

Boom, boom, boom! Joan woke suddenly, under the impression that someone was shaking her violently. She started up, but was so giddy with sleep and the rudeness of her awakening, that she would have fallen if she had not caught at the chair for support.

What had happened? She could hear the chink of the crockery on the shelf by the door, and a tin tray fell with a bang. This noise startled a big rat that was eating crumbs in a corner, and made it squeal smartly; then it scuttled across the floor almost over Joan's boots, and she herself had difficulty in suppressing the cry that rose to her lips. But both nurses were asleep, she would not startle them just because a big rat had scared her.

Boom, boom, boom! Surely the noise of guns was louder than it had been when the orderly brought the supper tray up for her! Joan was wide awake now. Shaking herself to get rid of her giddiness, she went softly into the room where she was supposed to sleep. This had a window that was very small, looking to the east. But it had in addition a funny old door, that was secured with a primitive wooden bolt. When this door was opened it gave on to a sort of cage, or balcony built into the wall. It was so very unsafe in appearance that Lady Huntly had decreed the door was not

to be opened, from fear of disaster if anyone stepped out on the crazy balcony.

Joan did not even think of this decree as she dragged at the door, which stuck in an obstinate fashion. It gave suddenly, nearly flinging her back into the room. At the same moment there was a jarring shock which set her nerves on edge. Then the black night sky was suddenly suffused with a red-and-orange glow that lingered a long moment and slowly faded out.

A wild panic seized Joan now. She guessed it was a shell that had exploded somewhere not far away; it was the force of the explosion that had shaken the ground, and the light in the sky had come from the flames that had burst out. How truly awful it was! Even as she watched she saw more sheets of light spread over the sky, she felt the ground rock beneath her, while the crazy old house creaked and groaned from the strain.

She must rouse the place. The patients must all be carried out to safety. Oh, the night was awful! Suppose the next bomb fell on the hospital, where so many wounded were sleeping, their suffering forgotten for a brief space. But would it be safe to carry them outside? Who could tell where the next bomb was going to drop? The night was dark. It was raining heavily. A shell was as likely to drop in the olive yards surrounding the hospital as on the building itself. Indeed, if there were spies directing the gun-fire, moving lights

about the place would be infinitely more dangerous than the darkness in which the place was now enveloped.

Softly she stole back into her room, and closing the door to keep out the wind, she groped her way to the other room where the nurses were lying. She meant to leave them asleep while she went to rouse the house. But was it wise to rouse the house? Even as she thought about it, Joan remembered that of course the night nurse in the wards with the wounded soldiers would be moving to and fro. She also would hear the noise, and feel the vibration, even if she did not chance to see the red-and-orange glow in the sky. It was up to the nurse to rouse the place. Then suddenly it came to the mind of Joan that it would be a very unwise proceeding to wake up all that suffering humanity and frighten them into fits for perhaps nothing at all. The shells might not fall near the building, in which case there would be no sense in making so many sick people frightened and uncomfortable.

Joan held her breath while she listened for any sound of movement in the other part of the house. The Sister and Lady Huntly were both light sleepers, and the night nurse was in a position to warn one or both of them without much trouble. With Joan it was different. She would have to traverse several long passages, she would have to go upstairs and downstairs, and she would have to leave her patients alone.

It was always so hard for her to make up her mind as

to the best course to pursue. In moments of crisis she was so fearfully undecided. It had always been her trouble. Of course it was owing to her want of confidence in her own judgment. But then that confidence had been so rudely shaken by all the disasters of those days at Swanton, when it had been in her power to have stopped a great wrong, and she had failed to do it.

Nurse Moira woke in a sudden fright, and called to Joan: "Oh, I have had such a dreadful dream! I thought the enemy were near enough to shell the hospital. You were asleep, and I could not wake you though I tried so hard. When I got out of bed I was so weak that I fell down, and though I cried as loudly as I could, no one came to help me, and still I could not wake you. Then there came an awful screech and roar, a rending explosion, and I woke."

"It was about time you did wake, I should say, after a vision of such magnitude!" exclaimed Joan, with a brisk cheerfulness that she was very far from feeling. "See, I will give you some warm milk, and then you must go to sleep again. Perhaps you won't have any bad dreams next time. At least we will hope so. I want you to be a lot better to-morrow, and the only way to accomplish that is to have a quiet night."

"What is that?" cried the sick nurse in a fright, as a hollow roar shook the house again, and the crockery on the shelf jarred and trembled.

"It is guns, of course; but then we are always hearing them at night, and in the day too, for the matter of that." Joan's voice was brisk still, but there was anxiety behind it. Nurse Moira had had one or two turns of being very violent indeed, and it was these attacks that Joan dreaded so greatly. On the last occasion she had been compelled to ask poor Nurse Kate to get out of bed and come to her assistance. Suppose there was a scene like this to be gone through to-night; and there would be, if she could not quiet her patient.

Never had Joan felt so helpless. The room was stuffy and close. Always at night she had been in the habit of keeping that little north window open, so that there might be air moving in the hot little chamber. To-night she had not dared to do this because of the noise of the guns, which was so much nearer. She set the door open which led into her own chamber, in the hope that this would give more air to her excited patient.

Nurse Kate was sleeping in a troubled fashion. Suddenly she reared up in bed, and began to talk rapidly, but with a clearness of utterance not usually found in people talking in their sleep.

"It is nonsense, I say it is nonsense. Of course spies would have no chance in a place like this, they would be spotted at once. And then they are saying that the spies who are doing us the most damage are those who walk about in khaki, as if anyone who wore the king's uniform would be false to his trust. I have

not talked. Why should I? Nurses don't know things that matter. Who dares to call me a spy?"

Her voice rang out with a shriek, and Joan had to leave Nurse Moira, and turn quickly to the other bed to keep Nurse Kate from flinging herself out on the floor. She was only just in time, and then the poor creature had an idea that Joan was an officer come to arrest her for having chattered to her patients concerning things that mattered.

"No, no, we are quite sure that you are not a spy. We are quite sure, too, that you have not chattered of dangerous matters, for the simple reason that you don't know anything that would be worth while to the enemy." Joan even forced a laugh that might have passed for merriment if one were not very observant.

Another loud roar shook the house. Nurse Moira, whose ears were strained in listening, cried out in dismay. Joan turned back to give her a word of comfort; but in that moment disaster happened, for Nurse Kate hurled herself on to the floor, shrieking wildly that she could not, and would not be arrested for treason. The one good thing about the matter in the eyes of Joan was that the commotion raised in getting the poor thing back to bed seemed most effectually to divert the mind of Nurse Moira from the thunder of the guns. Of course, by the time Joan had succeeded in getting Nurse Kate back on to the bed, the poor thing was lying in such a state of collapse that Joan deemed it her duty to

go and warn the Sister of the happenings of the night. She was dreadfully afraid that Nurse Kate would die, and the terror of it filled her with actual panic.

She looked round for the candle that she had put ready for an emergency like this. She had stood it on the shelf near to the door when she was putting the room straight for the night. To her exceeding dismay the candle had gone. The candlestick was there, but an enterprising rat had made its way up the wall on to the shelf, and had sloped with that precious bit of candle. There was the lamp that lighted the sick-room. But Joan would not dare to take that, for well she knew that Nurse Moira would go raving if she were left in the dark.

The only course left to her was to make her way along those winding passages without a light. The rats were holding high carnival out there; she could hear them squealing, and scurrying to and fro, as with both hands stretched out before her she groped her way forward. Up a stair, down a stair, round a corner, through a room used for stores of the bulkier sort. Crossing this room was indeed a terror. A fresh lot of stores had been brought up to-day, and in the hurry of things the bundles and bags had been dumped on the floor anyhow. It had never occurred to anyone, apparently, that it might be a good thing to leave a straight passage through this room. Joan bumped into a bale of goods and promptly went headlong. By the time she had picked herself up

and started again, her foot hitched in a cord from a case that had been unroped: down she went again. By the time she picked herself up from this muddle, she had properly lost her bearings. She could neither find the way out that she was seeking, nor could she find the way back. For a few minutes she groped here and fumbled her way there. Then panic seized her. She had left her patients because she wanted help, thinking that Nurse Kate was in extremity. Now she had failed to find the help she sought, and she had also left the poor sufferer alone. Oh, it was dreadful!

Something she must do to attract attention. She was far enough away from the sick-room for it not to matter if she made a noise, so she started crying out for some one to bring her a light. No one responded at first. From merely calling, Joan started shouting. Help she must have, and she was getting downright desperate.

A minute later, and she saw a flickering gleam of light growing bigger and nearer; then the calm and rather dictatorial voice of the Sister asked what was the matter.

"Oh, Sister!"—Joan was fairly sobbing now—"I am in such dreadful trouble, or I would not have made a fuss. Nurse Kate has had a bad turn of raving, she is lying almost in collapse. I started to come for you, but I had no candle, because the rats had carried mine off. Then I lost my way in this confusion of things. I could

neither find my way back to Nurse Kate, nor could I find the way to you."

The Sister gave a sudden, most unexpected ripple of laughter. She was a woman who rarely did laugh. Joan had been expecting a sharp reprimand for having deserted her post, grave as had been her need of help. The sound of merriment for the first moment fairly shocked her. Then she too began to see the funny side of things, and stopped crying to gurgle in amusement also.

"That is better!" said the Sister approvingly. She was close to Joan now, and holding her candle so that Joan could see how to clamber out from the confusion of cords, and half-opened cases, and bundles of every description among which her unwary feet had been caught. "It does not do to cry over difficulties in these days; if we do, our eyes are too dim to see the best way out. Been having a hard time, have you? Of course you are not fit for work of that sort. But seeing there was no other way, it had to be you or no one, and you have done very well."

Joan would cheerfully have endured all the terror and discomfort of that long night over again, on the chance of hearing such words of commendation as this from the Sister, who so rarely praised anyone. Indeed, it was worth while to have hard times, since the very difficulties had paved the way to this.

She picked her way out of the confusion, got free of

the snares that awaited unwary feet; then as she went with the Sister back to the room where the sick nurses were lying, she spoke of the nearness of the gun-fire and the sounds she had heard of the bursting shells.

"It is getting nearer certainly," remarked the Sister, but there was no panic in her calm voice. "You were quite right not to raise a commotion about what you heard. Of course, yours are not the only wakeful ears in the hospital to-night, and we have been very full of concern for our patients. It would have been of no avail to carry them out to the wet dark night. They would assuredly have caught pneumonia, or malaria; as it is, they are dry and comfortable in their beds. No shells may touch the hospital to-night. If they do, we may still be able to save the people under our care. We can only do our best, and leave results in Higher Hands than ours. Ah!"

The exclamation was dragged from the Sister as a big rat ran over her foot. Brave woman that she was, she had no courage where rats were concerned, and Joan went before her for the remainder of the way and shooed the horrid creatures off. They found Nurse Kate lying in a stupor that seemed so like death that Joan cried out in dismay; but the Sister soon brought back a tremor of returning life to the apparently inanimate form, and then she gave Joan a few clear instructions as to what to do in case of a return of delirium.

"I think she is too spent to rave much more to-night,

but she may slip into stupor again," said the Sister; and then she turned to the other bed, where Nurse Moira was lying with wide-open eyes and a scared look.

"Sister, it has been an awful night," she said with a moan, as she looked up at the strong calm face bending over her. "It has been worse than dying to hear the thunder of those awful guns, and to be so helpless to escape from them."

"It will teach you sympathy with the poor fellows in your care, who come out of the turmoil with wrecked nerves and get called cowards." The Sister's voice had a stern ring now. Nurse Moira was one of the nurses who in the past had had to be reprimanded for this very thing, and the memory of it was in the mind of the Sister as she spoke.

The flickering of the sick woman's eyelids showed that she too was mindful of the reproof which had been so richly deserved. Then she said humbly: "Sister, Nurse Kate has been raving to-night about her want of discretion in chattering so much of matters best not talked about. The poor thing thought that she was to be arrested for giving information to spies. But she has not been more indiscreet than I have. It seemed so nice to know things that mattered, and to have the men asking questions. Of course I never dreamed that anyone wearing uniform, and being wounded in the service of the King, would be a traitor. Now they are saying that the spies must be in our very midst. One

does not know who may be trusted, so perhaps I as well as Nurse Kate may be to blame."

"Let it be a warning for the future, that least said is soonest mended," the Sister answered. "There is no sense in worrying about the past, now that you can neither help nor hinder what of good or bad you have done. Lie still and rest. I am sorry that you have had such a troubled night. It is nearly morning now. If you can go to sleep, you will feel better. Good night!" The Sister went out of the room carrying her candle with her. She had brought strength with her, and hope, and courage. Nothing seemed quite so bad, or so hard to bear, when she had gone. Joan tucked Nurse Moira up as comfortably as possible, and soon had the satisfaction of seeing that she had gone to sleep. Nurse Kate was also sleeping. The thunder of the guns had died down, and for the first time in that long night of trouble a sense of real restfulness descended upon Joan.

She left the door between the two rooms wide open, and stretching herself, fully dressed as she was, on her bed, she was asleep at once, just the healthy, untroubled slumber of a worker worn out with toil. No dread of a falling shell came to disturb her. She was at rest in the truest sense of the word.

CHAPTER X

A Hasty Exodus

IT was early the next morning that an official appeared from head-quarters—a big-wig he was in military circles too, a man whose grip of things was so clear and forceful that he got a matter carried straight through to a satisfactory finish while other people were just beginning to turn over the pros and cons of the start. He was shut up with Lady Huntly and the Sister-in-charge for just half an hour. At the end of that time it was definitely arranged that the little V.A.D. hospital was to be moved to a small village about fifteen miles away, and that the exodus was to take place that day. There were many reasons why a change of place would be good, but the all-important reason of the sudden exodus was that the military authorities feared the place was no longer safe. Rumour said that shells had fallen or bombs had been dropped at some place less than a mile away, but there was no one who could say that the rumour was a true one, and, indeed, everybody was too busy to have any time for talk or speculation.

Quite a fleet of motor ambulances arrived for the con-

veyance of the patients and the staff; behind these, huge motor-lorries rumbled over the uneven track that was called a road, and the business of upheaval began. The sick nurses were sent forward with the other patients, but Joan was left behind to oversee the dismantling of the kitchen, as the cook had been obliged to go forward to get her new kitchen into working order before the arrival of the patients.

To Joan, shut for days in a sick-room, the change of work was really delightful. She bustled round, encouraging the slow ones, preaching steadiness and discretion to the hasty ones, whose ideas of packing seemed to be confounded with their ideas of smashing, judging by results. She was very glad to think there was a move taking place. In her heart she was hoping that something would happen so that John Standish would be taken somewhere else before he was well enough to recognize her. There was nothing she so much dreaded as to see the hard look come into his eyes, and then to watch him turn away from her. Of course, as she told herself, this was only wounded pride, and she deserved to suffer. All the same, it was only human to wince at the pain.

Her duty made it necessary for her to stay until the last lorry had been loaded, and then, when it had lumbered away after the others, she was packed into the side-car of a motor-cycle for the run across country to the new quarters for the V.A.D. It was a raw, cold

afternoon, a mournful wind sighed across the marshes, and fitful gusts of rain were swept into the face of Joan. The cycle was ridden by Staff-Sergeant Brown, who was stout, elderly, and not used to motor-cycles. The machine, which had started life as a very good one, was long past its first youth, and the first mile was hardly over before trouble began. The engine was addicted to four-strokes, or whatever that might be. Joan knew more about it than the staff-sergeant, and when he had worked himself into a perspiration, and was nearly black in the face from his effort to keep his language fit for polite ears, she wriggled out of her rug, climbed out of the side-car and came to his help.

"What is the matter with her?" Joan asked in a cheerful tone, and she smiled down at the worthy Brown, who was grovelling on the ground, and looking as if he were going to have a fit.

"She four-strokes half the time, and I can't get any speed out of her without jerking," he answered, with the patient toleration one shows towards very young children or very aged people.

"That is because you don't understand her," said Joan. Then she came closer and edged the worthy man to one side. "Get up, if you please, and let me come. I know what is the matter, and I will put it right for you."

"What do you know about motor-bikes, miss?" demanded Staff-Sergeant Brown with an air of deep

suspicion. If it had been the first of April he would have made up his mind that Joan was taking a rise out of him. Even as it was, he felt by no means sure that she was not making fun of him in some fashion that was not as yet quite clear to him.

"Oh, I can take a machine to pieces and put it together again, so I am not quite a duffer," she answered with a laugh. She was on her knees now, and busy with the mechanism, while Staff-Sergeant Brown hovered close by wondering what was going to happen next.

"I never heard of a young lady understanding so much about motor-bikes before," he remarked, and then in silence brought her the tools for which she asked, passed them to her as she wanted them, and then put them into their places once more.

"Perhaps not," she said lightly. "All the same, it is a very good thing for you that I do happen to know something about your machine. The poor old thing is desperately out of order, and it has been sadly misused too, so I am not surprised that you have not been able to get much speed on her. There, I think that is put right. Now, the best thing you can do is to get into the side-car and let me drive. If you get her wrong again I may not be able to put her right for you; but I think I can undertake to keep her going until we reach our new quarters."

"I should like to know what they would be saying about me if I went riding in the side-car and left all the

trouble of driving to a girl!" burst out Staff-Sergeant Brown in tremendous indignation at the bare idea of such a thing. "Why, I should be the laughing-stock of the whole camp, and the Colonel would rag me like fits. He's uncommon active with his tongue when there is any fault to be found."

"He will doubtless rag you if you fail to turn up to time owing to break-down, especially when I tell him that the break-down is entirely because you refused to let me drive. But if you do not mind, I am sure that I do not. If I am not at the hospital when I am wanted it will not be my fault, so I may as well take things easy. It will be quite a change to sit out in the car for half the night while you work yourself to death in getting the engine to run smoothly again." Joan permitted herself a gurgle of contented laughter as she spoke, and then she began to roll herself in the rug before climbing into the car once more.

For a moment Staff-Sergeant Brown hesitated. He was fat and elderly, but he was also more sensitive than any boy, and the mere thought of the ridicule that would be his portion in the camp when it was known he had been brought in by a girl was enough to make his hair stand on end. The other side to the question was the dead seriousness of the business on which they were engaged. For aught he knew the Colonel might be wanting him very badly. Duty was duty, and he had always put it first, as was right and proper. In his own

mind he had not a doubt that Joan could do all she had claimed herself capable of doing. The way in which she had gone to work on the engine told him that she was a real mechanic, and he was quite positive that she knew a lot more about the machine than he did.

"Very well, miss, I'm afraid you won't be very comfortable on that saddle, but as you seem to know a good deal more about the thing than I do, I'm quite willing for you to take the job over."

"Now, that is really nice of you!" exclaimed Joan with a radiant smile. She realized what a tremendous battle he must have had with himself before he reached the point of being willing to give way to her in this fashion. It was a keen joy to her to take over the lead. She made him get into the car, then running the machine along the road to make it fire, she sprang to the saddle as alertly as if she had been a boy. Oh, she was at home on a motor-cycle, and although this great clumsy machine had only the remotest likeness to her own, still there was the same joy in the swift movement. The pace was truly terrific. Joan understood to a nicety how to get the very best out of a motor-cycle, and although she had to slow down every time they approached and passed one of the lorries that were running the hospital equipment to the new quarters, she made up for it between whiles.

The new quarters were a series of houses of one story that had been hastily vacated by their rightful

tenants to make room for the V.A.D. All the houses had wooden shutters in place of windows, most of them had an oven outside for the baking of bread. In each house there was a low wall which separated the part ordinarily used by the human tenants from those of their animals. The animals' quarters had been hastily got ready, too hastily for absolute cleanliness; still, the result was not bad, and there was much less work in running the hospital under these new conditions than there had been in the old rat-ridden house that had just been vacated. The new quarters were much nearer to camp and to civilization, and in many ways the change seemed a good one. The nurses who were ill began to recover, and the wounded soldiers were mostly doing well, although some of the poor fellows had died.

Five days later a thrill of horror ran through the little community. The news went round that the old quarters of Lady Huntly's V.A.D. had been destroyed by shell-fire.

"Suppose we had been there!" cried little Miss Gregory, bringing the news to Joan, who was still assisting the nursing staff, while wounded men filled her place in the kitchen.

"But we were not, so it is all right." Joan smiled bravely, although the thought of what might have been turned her rather faint. Suppose—suppose—but after all, where was the sense of supposing anything, seeing

that they were safely housed fifteen miles away from the danger zone?

"They are saying that we have spies here in the camp, it may be in this very V.A.D.," went on Miss Gregory, whose pink-and-white face had a pinched look as if the news she was telling had gripped her very closely.

"Spies, here?" cried Joan with incredulous horror in her tone. Then her thoughts went swiftly back to Swanton, and she seemed to see the young man leaving that funny old house in the High Street, with the bag of books and papers that he had stolen. She had had her chance of running one spy in, and she had not been awake to her privileges. No wonder that she hated to hear the word spy mentioned, for it always brought her wretchedness back.

Miss Gregory nodded, then she went on eagerly enough: "It is common talk that orders given at the camp are known on the other side so quickly that you might almost think they were sent by telegraph. Of course it may be the natives, though there don't seem to be any natives except the few shepherds and their big savage dogs. Isn't it an awfully dead-alive place, Miss Haysome? Fancy living here in peace times!" Miss Gregory, who was standing at the door of the house which was the ward where Joan was nursing, craned her head to look round the angle of the building and away across the wide stretch of country, that was

dotted here and there with clumps of shrubs, although of tall trees in that direction there were none to be seen. A row of beehives, made from the trunks of trees, stood just round the corner of the building, and the colour of the earth was a dull red that showed up the silver-grey stems of the shrubs, with the greyish leafage that still clung to the branches. Black and white sheep were feeding in the middle distance, and they were guarded by lean, savage dogs, and the solitary figure of a shepherd who stood outlined against the clear cold tints of the autumn sky.

No wonder Miss Gregory shivered at the bare idea of such an existence. Her tastes were for crowds, for picture palaces, and for constant life, movement, and gaiety. Here, it was like being in another world.

Joan's eyes took on a darker tinge. "Life here in peace time would only be tolerable if one were very happy, or very miserable, I think. But with that we have nothing to do, for it is not peace time, unfortunately, and if it were, we should go home in a hurry."

"Oh, I don't want to go home!" exclaimed the other. "I can't bear to think of going back to the sort of life we led before the war. Teas and tennis, boating, and bathing, doing fancy-work, that no one wanted, for bazaars, and calling it charity. Who wants charity, when the very grandest thing in life is to help each other?"

Joan laughed. She had heard Miss Gregory talk in

this strain before, but all the same she knew that the flighty little person, who talked so impressively about the nobility of helping each other, had only that morning been severely reprimanded for burning the porridge of the poor wounded men for whom she had to care. Then, too, there were complaints about the washing of the milk cups, and many other trifles of that kind, which served to show that the noblest things in life are often those which do not count in casual observation.

"The man with the broken jaw is so interesting," went on Miss Gregory after a brief pause, which she had spent in wondering why Joan was laughing. "He is getting better, too, although he can't talk. I heard Sister talking to the doctor about him this morning, and they said that he was going to work again tomorrow."

"Nonsense!" cried Joan sharply. "Why, it is not a week ago that one of his comrades told me he was dying."

Miss Gregory nodded her head. "Yes, I know that Sister, and the doctor, too, thought he was going to send in his checks, don't they call it?" Miss Gregory giggled at her own poor wit, then went on: "But that was a week or more ago; since then he has got better by leaps and bounds. The authorities are in want of a guide through the Betchik marshes, and he is the only man, not a native, who can do the work; the next best man has his legs riddled with shrapnel, and is

not likely to be able to stand alone for six months to come."

"John Standish is not fit for work, especially such work!" exclaimed Joan impulsively, and then was immediately angry with herself because of the astonishment in the face of the other.

"Is that his name? And do you know him? How very interesting! Tell me some more, please," cried Miss Gregory, her manner eager and alert.

Joan turned hurriedly away, ashamed at her own want of discretion. She was still more ashamed of the fierce pain and longing which had shot into her heart when that other girl talked of the hardships and danger that he would have to face, and he an invalid still.

CHAPTER XI

In the Wards

THAT night Joan was on duty helping the night nurse. She had been back in the kitchen, acting as assistant to the cook, since the hospital had been moved. A nurse had been borrowed from another hospital, forty miles away, to take care of the two sick nurses. The Sister felt there was grave danger for an inexperienced girl like Joan, in having to cope day and night with such a heavy task. It had been hard work to get a nurse, but it had been managed, and no one but Joan herself could realize how great was the lifting of the burden. She was very seedy for the first few days after the moving was accomplished. The terror of that last night in the old rat-ridden house had been almost greater than she could bear, and its effects were hard to get rid of. Lady Huntly and the Sister watched her secretly with a good deal of anxiety. But Joan had a good constitution and a very hopeful temperament, which last was an amazing help at a time like this.

She was so much better in a few days that she was well able to act as assistant to the night nurse, who at this time had to divide her attention between four houses

every night. The houses were very close together certainly. All the same, when the nurse was in one house she could not be attending to patients in other houses, so it was necessary for her to have at least an able-bodied assistant, and for the rest, the strongest and least unfit of the patients had to be ready to lend a hand, if necessary, while the nurse was absent.

Joan was eager and excited at the thought of being a real V.A.D. nurse. The service she had rendered in taking care of the sick nurses did not seem to count as professional work in her eyes, just because the patients were not wounded soldiers, although she shrewdly guessed that she would never have had her chance of this real nursing, if she had not faithfully done her duty in the hard bit of work that had devolved on her untrained hands.

The night nurse was a little woman with an eager, bustling manner, and she showed such zest in keeping her patients alive, that the men used to tell her they had to get better in spite of themselves, just because they would not dare disappoint her by dying.

"Now, my dear, whatever you do, and however you feel, please remember that you have to keep a bright face." The nurse looked Joan up and down as she spoke, and decided that her new assistant at least looked capable. She knew, of course, how well Joan had served in the other house, but her fear had been lest that experience might have heaped her up, and

made her too confident and self-sure, which is what no nurse should be, if it is going to hinder her efficiency by making her unwilling to learn.

"I will look bright," answered Joan; then she added: "I shall be dreadfully nervous inside though, for I make such ghastly mistakes, and I have never had to nurse wounded soldiers."

"Ignorance does not count so much if only the nurse is wise enough to know that she is ignorant," said the nurse briskly. "I have a couple of very bad cases in Number Three house to-night. It is quite possible that I shall not be able to do more than walk through the other houses perhaps twice in the night. It is fortunate in every way that my two bad cases are together. You will find that John Standish will be a great help to you in Number Two house, while in One and Four there is not very much to do, except to give broth and milk when it is needed."

A sudden tremor shook Joan. So she would have to meet John Standish, perhaps to work with him; and she was wondering whatever she would do if he recognized her. All the eager anticipation with which she had faced that night's work died away suddenly, to be replaced by a nervous dread.

"I thought Miss Gregory said that John Standish was going to work to-morrow?" she exclaimed, her dismay more apparent than she meant it to be. "He is a guide, is he not?"

"Yes," replied the nurse, and there was considerable asperity in her tone. "He is a guide, and he is going to work, so they say; but he is by no means fit to be out of hospital. He would not be allowed to do anything yet, but for the fact that there is no one on the ground who can do what he can. They say that his knowledge of the marshes is simply wonderful. He knows more about the swamps than many of the natives who have lived here all their lives. Of course, too, he is to be trusted. That is more than can be said of many of the natives, according to all accounts; and as far as looks go, I must confess that I have never seen a more villainous-looking set of savages. Now, do you understand all about your work, or are there any more questions that you want to ask me before I go?"

"I can't think of any," answered Joan. "I expect there will be forty things I shall want to know later on, when I cannot possibly come to bother you. I shall get through somehow though, so don't worry about me. You say that Corporal Smart will very likely go off his head at the turn of the night?"

"I did not say 'very likely'; I said that he would certainly begin to rave—he always does," corrected the nurse. "When he starts giving trouble, you will just have to rouse John Standish. He is the only man in Number Two house who is able to help hold him, and it is holding down that he will want. Mind you wake him before Smart makes noise enough to rouse all the other

patients. It is hard on the poor fellows that they should have to put up with all that row every night; they get such broken rest."

Joan nodded in sympathy with the patients. A good deal of pity for herself crept into her heart at that minute. It seemed such a hard bit to have in prospect. She was so horribly afraid of people in delirium. All the same, she did not mean to rouse John Standish a moment sooner than she could help, just because he had to go to work next day, and he was not fit for it.

The men in houses One and Four were mostly convalescent. They greeted her cheerfully when she opened the doors and went in. That was the first time. The next time she made her rounds it was snores and deep breathing that met her ears, and as she passed in and out among the beds she did not find one man awake who needed her. This was a real comfort, for the night was wearing on to the turn. It was to be expected that matters in Number Two house would hold her very closely for the next hour or so. She softly closed the door of Number Four house behind her, and stepped out on to the cinder path that led to Number Two. That cinder path was a great comfort. There had been yawning mud puddles before every house when the hospital came to occupy the place. There had been no time to make proper paths, and no one to do the work. But cinders had been dumped into every puddle, and the

result was that the nurses could pass to and fro between the wards without wetting their feet.

The night was clear and star-lit. There had been no rain for nearly twenty-four hours, which was something of a wonder at that season. Joan looked out over the wide, barren countryside, and thought of what Miss Gregory had said about the awful solitude it must be in peace times. It was crowded enough now with people, and with work. There were so many things to be done, and so little time to do the things in, that the miles on miles of barren solitude did not seem to count.

Unconsciously her feet lingered on that short passage from house to house. She had to go past the shut door of Number Three, where the night nurse was doing her grim battle with death over the two bad cases lying there. Just beyond, between that house and Number Two, was a vision of weird beauty as seen faintly outlined against the star-lit sky. The clumps of shrubs, the rolling lines of the distant hills all looked so different under the soft gloom of the night. It was so peaceful too. Of course in the background there was the intermittent sound of guns. There always was that in this part of the world, or so it seemed to Joan.

"Out at 'em, boys, we'll have 'em yet! We ain't going to be beaten, not we!" a harsh stentorian voice broke across the hush of the night.

Joan gave a little jump at the sound, and all her nerves seemed to jar. She sprang hastily forward, and

pushing open the door of Number Two house, was at once in the ward. Happily, too, she was close beside the bed of Corporal Smart, who under the influence of delirium had struggled to a sitting posture, and was shouting to his men to rally and rush the next trench.

"Don't be beaten, lads, don't be beaten! Go at 'em with a rush!" he shouted, and he was working hard to tear off his bandages as Joan came hurriedly to his side.

She remembered dimly that the night nurse had told her to rouse John Standish at once. But there was no time to go across to his bed in the far corner. She had to act, and that quickly, to keep the poor delirious patient from dragging the bandages from his unhealed wounds. He was a powerful man, he was scarlet and purple in the face with fever, and his voice rang out with a clarion sound.

"Oh, hush, hush, you must not make such a noise!" she said emphatically. "Just think of all the other poor men, and how badly they want to sleep. It is night now; lie down again, then you will feel better when the morning comes. You must not pull your bandages off. The doctor will have to hurt you so badly to-morrow."

"Why, Nurse, whatever are you doing here?" demanded the patient in amazement. "It is wonderful the plucky things a woman will do, but a nurse in the forward rush to take a trench is something quite out of the common; stand clear, my dear, and just let me get

my arm free so that I can hold my bayonet, then I will be after them rats of Germans that are hiding in the trench over there. Out of my way, Nurse, I say! out of my way!"

"Oh, help, help!" It was the voice of Joan that rang out now. She had flung her arms round the stalwart form of the corporal, and was doing her very best to keep him in his bed. But he was a strong man under the spell, and the strength of his fever. She was only a girl, and she realized what a losing game she was playing. Then a strong arm thrust her firmly aside. Corporal Smart was laid down in the bed and held there, while a mumbling voice said:

"Steady, old man, steady! You'll never take that trench at a rush. It is lying low that will do it. Now then, listen hard, and you will hear them run."

Joan gave a gasp of relief that was very near a sob. She had not realized that John Standish was awake, and quite close to her, when she had called out to him. She was looking at him now with quite a new light on his character. Previously he had been to her a deeply injured man, a person to be pitied. He had suffered sorely, and chiefly because of her blundering, but he had not been heroic in her eyes, nor a man capable of helping, comforting, and giving strength.

"Shall I do it by lying low?" gasped the corporal, who was breathless and panting with his efforts. There was a wildness in his eye that warned both John and

Joan he would be up again in a minute unless he could be beguiled into keeping still.

"Yes, yes," mumbled John, in the queer guttural tone that came from his broken jaw. "You will do it! Just listen to them running!" With his foot he was beating against the wooden partition that cut the house in halves, and the noise he made was like a man running. He nodded to Joan to help him with the illusion, and she did her best to imitate the noise he was making.

The other patients had roused, snorted, grunted, and growled according to their mood, and then had turned over to sleep again. Every night they were being roused like this, and they were so used to it that after the first shock of being awakened they did not trouble very much.

Joan was trembling with excitement. There was the secret dread in her heart that John would recognize her. She was all the time covertly watching to see him turn away with the cold dislike in his eyes that he had shown during those days of his convalescence at Swanton. If that look came there again, Joan felt as if she would die. Apparently, however, he never gave her personality a thought. He was wholly concerned with quieting the burly corporal. He did it too. Joan simply marvelled as she watched the ecstatic look on the sick soldier's face as he lay listening to the thumping of the feet against the partition.

"Why, yes, the beggars are running, so they are!"

he said joyfully, but now he made no attempt to rise and pursue. "Let 'em alone, boys. If they are so scared as to run, there is no especial need for us to run after them. I am as tired as if I had been at plough all day. Hullo, Nurse! Still here, are you? Well, you are a plucky sort! I like a woman with pluck. But you are the first woman I ever knew who came right into battle with the men. Here, I say, boys, look out! Them beastly Germans are coming back again!" As he spoke the corporal lifted himself in bed, and heaved his big form straight at Joan, whom in his delirium he appeared to have mistaken for a troop of the enemy. Corporal Smart had been serving in Flanders before he was sent to Salonika, and whatever might chance to be the nationality of the foe he had to encounter, to him they were all Germans straight out from Berlin.

Instinctively Joan dodged. If she had not, she would have had the whole weight of his big frame down upon her, for with a sudden weakening he collapsed as it were and crumbled into a heap.

John Standish lifted him back on to the bed. He would not let Joan help him do this. "No, Nurse, I can manage; and he is more weight than you ought to tackle. It is amazing to me how you nurses do manage to lift such heavy patients, and to do it with so little hurt to yourselves. All the same, it is the duty of a man to spare you when and where he can."

Joan nodded by way of gratitude. It was really nice

to hear him talking to her in this friendly tone. The drawback to her satisfaction, however, lay in the fact that she knew he would not have been so pleasant to her, if he had recognized her as the girl who had been the means of bringing him so much trouble in the past summer. It was a great puzzle to her that he had not known her again. The very fact of her having impressed him so much, should have stamped her face on his memory according to her ideas, even though the impression must of necessity be a disagreeable one. She did not take into account the fact that some people are not quick at recognitions, and that John Standish was one of these.

The sick man was lying with closed eyes. He was utterly spent. Joan tried to get him to drink a little broth, but he did not seem able to swallow. A man in a bed on the other side of the partition called out for something to drink. Joan was just holding the cup to the corporal's lips, so John went off to look after the other man for her. There had been no time to take the partitions down in the houses, and it was one of the grave drawbacks to the place for hospital purposes. John was round by the other bed, holding the man who wanted a drink so that the poor fellow could take it. He had both hands occupied, and his attention was fully taken up by the business in hand, for this patient had a wound which affected the throat and made swallowing difficult.

"Nurse, get out of the way, quick! That fat German is going to run you through with his bay'net, the unspeakable blighter!" The voice of the corporal rose to a shout. He seized Joan, whirling her round and sending the cup flying out of her hand. Luckily it was one of the enamelled variety and not breakable. It hit the door with a resounding bang, and at that moment the night nurse entered the house.

"Pray, what is all this commotion about?" she demanded, her brisk astonishment sounding really funny in the momentary wild confusion. Joan had gripped the corporal by the shoulders, and was holding him fast down. The man in the next bed, who had a shattered thigh and could not move, was shouting to John to come and help the little nurse; while John himself had just knocked down a tin wash bowl, which added another note to the rest of the noise and clatter.

It was Joan who kept the corporal in the bed. She was proud of it after. At the moment it did not seem to be a very great thing to do, but at least she was proving her efficiency. John Standish came leaping round the side of the partition, mumbling protests which would have had their due effect on the corporal if the poor fellow had been in a position to take any notice of them. The night nurse uttered a few brief words of command and encouragement, then stood aside, letting the other two cope with the trouble; which was, of course, the right thing to do. The fit of delirium was

worse this time. The poor fellow seemed to have the strength of ten men rolled into one. He fought, and shouted, and struggled. Joan was breathless and spent, but she kept her grip on his shoulders, and she talked to him in the most cheerful and encouraging fashion that she could think of. All through the struggle she was conscious of the hand of John Standish close behind her own; of his watchful strength guarding hers; and it was compensation for all that she had had to endure, to think that as a stranger she could win his respect and his liking. She had not had a fair chance before; now it was up to her to retrieve some at least of the blunders of her past, and she was doing it.

Even the strongest of delirious patients cannot rave always. Corporal Smart was thoroughly exhausted at last, and then he sank into a heavy sleep. The night nurse had gone again before this desirable climax was reached.

Joan was spent and breathless with the struggle. But her eyes were shining. Hope was coming back to her heart. The night had given her confidence in herself. More, it had given her the joy of winning approval from the man who had refused to believe in her. She had won his respect just because he had not known who she was; but all the same she had won it, and nothing could take away her satisfaction.

Then she was struck with the tired look of the man. She remembered he had to go to work to-morrow, and

he was not strong yet. Leaving him sitting by the sleeping corporal, she hurried away to make him a cup of tea and a piece of toast. It was not the most nourishing of meals, but it was the best she could do.

"What are you going to have, Nurse?" he asked, as she put the steaming cup into his hand.

"I shall have my breakfast—no, my supper—when I go off duty, and then I shall go to bed. But you have to go to work," she answered with a smile.

"All the same, you are to have a cup of tea now, or I shall not have any," he said with decision; and then he put his cup down with such an air of finality that Joan realized the uselessness of protesting, and at once proceeded to make herself a cup of tea.

"You will get a couple of hours' sleep before you have to go on duty, won't you?" she asked a little later. She had been out to the other two houses under her care, and now she had come back to take charge in Number Two until she was relieved.

"Yes, and I can sleep anywhere," he answered. Then he smiled at her, and went away to his bed on the other side of the partition.

CHAPTER XII

A Shock

A COUPLE of weeks slipped away. The staff of Lady Huntly's hospital had settled into stride as it were, and that in the face of difficulties which might well have daunted a less-determined band. They were faced with all sorts of major and minor worries. Sometimes the milk supply failed. Sometimes it was meat that they could not get. On one really tragic day the supply of flour ran out, and no bread could be made. The patients had to be fed on oatmeal porridge and biscuits, while the staff supported existence on pea-soup and potatoes.

They were so far from the base that supplies were long in reaching them. There was much irregularity, too, in the mails, which came sometimes two in one week, then perhaps would miss a week entirely. Joan had always a big bunch of letters when the mail did arrive. Her family took good care that she should not feel left out of things although she was so far from home.

No mail had reached the V.A.D. for many days, and everyone was grouching more or less about the want of

news. Rumours there were in plenty of all sorts of happenings, but no one seemed able to say from what source tidings had reached them. John Standish came and went in his capacity of guide, but from the day when Joan had helped the doctor to dress the wounds and get the broken jaw into place, she had not seen the man to whom she had wrought so much harm by her want of promptness.

Colonel Guest, who was in command of the camp to which the hospital was attached, was a brother of Lady Huntly, and, indeed, that was one of the reasons why she had set her heart on bringing her V.A.D. to Salonika. The Colonel was very often over at the hospital, for brother and sister were warmly attached, and times of trouble and strain like these did certainly make for the strengthening of family ties. One day when he was expected the Colonel failed to arrive. Lady Huntly was especially anxious that he should have some papers that had been sent up to her from the base by a special messenger. There was no one on hand who could take a message just then, and as Lady Huntly declared she must get the papers to her brother, Joan volunteered to be the messenger. She even succeeded in getting the motor-cycle into working order, and made the journey in the quickest fashion possible. The machine had been left at the hospital because it had broken down after the last time of using, and took so much pains and patience in the repairing.

The Colonel was in the guard-room, so the first orderly she met told her when she reached the camp. Then another orderly said that he was in the mess-kitchen doing a round of inspection. Joan thought the quickest way to find him was to follow him round until she really succeeded in running him to earth. From the mess-kitchen she had to go to the long low line of sheds where scientific work was done, and here she caught sight of him in busy talk with a young officer whom she did not know. She did not like to send an orderly to tell him that she desired speech with him, and so she waited in the background determined that she would not lose sight of him, but await her chance of speaking to him directly he had finished talking to the officer.

The two came slowly towards her. She was standing now just outside the door of the shed, and the hot sun was pouring down upon her. It was winter certainly; but in Salonika it is quite possible to find really hot days as a variant to the snow and frost and bitter winds of normal winter weather, and this was one of those happy days.

The officer to whom the Colonel was talking seemed to feel the heat. He repeatedly lifted his cap and wiped his forehead. The two had come quite close to Joan now, and the young officer in his earnest talk had veered round so that he stood side face to Joan, with the brilliant sunshine pouring down upon him.

She had moved a little so that she might be out of earshot, and she was wondering whether after all it would not be better for her to retire, and send an orderly to ask that she might speak to the Colonel, when she was suddenly startled by noticing a deep scar over the left eyebrow of the young man. Where had she seen a scar like that before? Like a white light of revelation it flashed upon her that this was the man whom she had seen coming out of the old house in the Swanton High Street on the day when the papers of John Standish had been taken away.

But it could not be the same! She would not allow herself to think such a foolish thing. That man was a German spy; this officer was wearing the King's uniform. It was plain, too, that he was a person of importance. The manner of the Colonel showed that. He was parting from the young man now. Joan felt faint and sick; she was feeling as if she had suddenly taken root in the ground, and could not move if she tried. The young officer saluted and, turning away, went off with a quick step.

The Colonel came to meet Joan then. Seeing her there waiting, he guessed that she had come over with some message for him from his sister, and so he swept his other business aside in order to see what she wanted.

Joan stood staring in a stupid fashion, but recovered herself by a great effort so that she might deliver her message as it had been given to her. Colonel Guest was

in a great hurry. He told Joan that he would come over to the hospital later if he could manage to find the time, and that meanwhile he would look through the papers and bring them back with him. Joan tried hard to screw her courage to the point of asking the name of the officer to whom the Colonel had been talking so earnestly, but his manner was so very repressive that she turned coward; she could not face a probable snubbing for what certainly looked like impertinence. After all she might have been misled by a chance likeness, and she ran the motor-cycle along, then mounted and rode like the wind, hoping to get away from the troublesome thoughts and convictions that were pursuing her.

It was really very remarkable that although she could not even to herself describe the man who had called himself Robert Forbes, and had told Mrs. Lewis that he was a friend of John Standish, yet she always recognized him instantly when she encountered him. She had known without a shadow of doubt that it was he whom she had seen in the train. So also she knew now without a shadow of doubt that this was the man himself and no other.

What was she to do? Sput, sput, thud, thud! Quite mechanically her brain was registering the throbbing of the engine. Ah, the machine was going wrong! Her thoughts switched off for a moment from her own private worry, and she concentrated her whole attention on the machine she was riding. It was like a fractious

human being who wanted coaxing and cheering along. Joan set herself to the task of nursing it into better behaviour, and succeeded so much beyond her expectations that she reached the hospital in record time, and felt something of a victor in consequence.

She went straight to Lady Huntly's private room to give the message she had brought, then, when it was done, she lingered to ask a question. "It sounds most fearfully curious and impertinent, I know, but could you tell me the name of the officer to whom Colonel Guest was talking this morning? I know most of the officers at the camp, but this one was a stranger."

Lady Huntly laughed. "My dear child, do you think that I have the gift of second sight?"

"He was slight and dark, and he had a deep scar over his left eyebrow." Joan tumbled her words out with desperate eagerness. If only she knew what to do! If only there was someone to whom she could go for advice! So far she could only grope, as it were, in the dark.

"The younger officers are mostly slight," remarked Lady Huntly in an amused tone. "They are invariably dark too, unless they are fair, and scars are a hall-mark of their profession in these days. But why this curiosity, my dear Joan! Have you met the man before, or is it a case of love at first sight?"

Joan flushed, then went ghastly white. There was more than a streak of vulgarity in Lady Huntly, al-

though it was rarely apparent. To-day, worn by the strain of everyday things, and unconsciously craving some break in the monotony of the daily anxiety, she, Lady Huntly, had reverted to type, as it were, the elemental had come up through the veneer of training and culture, and had shown itself on the outside, that was all. To Joan the glimpse was like tragedy. She could not open her heart to Lady Huntly after this, and a nurse coming into the room at this moment, she turned and fled. All through that day her worries pursued her. They attacked on the right hand and on the left, they met her in the front, they rushed upon her from behind, and the very air seemed full of her perplexity and her own particular problems.

It was that same evening that the belated English mail arrived. Letters for the hospital were sent over from the camp, arriving just as the staff was going to bed. Joan seized her own particular bundle of letters, cards, and papers, then went off to her bed, feeling that she would certainly not have much rest that night. There were long letters from her father and mother, each of the boys had written, and Amy had sent a detailed account of all the home-happenings that the others had forgotten. There was a letter full of encouragement and cheer from Aunt Mary, and then, in addition, there was a great batch of letters from friends and acquaintances. Among these last was a long epistle from Nancy Pringle. Nancy wrote in the highest of

high spirits. She had fallen in love at last, and she was engaged to Lieutenant Rodney Frost, who had gone with his regiment to Salonika.

"It is lovely to think that you may meet Rodney, Joan. I have told him about you, and how splendidly you are doing your bit for the old country. I wanted him to let me volunteer for something, but, as I don't know how to do anything that is useful, we decided that I had better stay at home and wait on the chance of his getting leave to come home again. He said that even if I did volunteer for anything, it might happen that he and I would be miles apart and never see each other at all. I am just dreadfully happy, Joan. It is so nice to be engaged; one feels so much more important. I hope we shall get married before the war is over. I should love to have one of those hurriedly arranged war-weddings, they add so to the romance of marriage. The world is so humdrum that one needs these sort of uplifts to make existence tolerable."

There was a lot more in the letter, for Nancy was a voluminous correspondent, and, as she had nothing in particular to do with her days, she filled in a large part of her abundant leisure with writing to her friends.

Joan laughed a good bit over Nancy's reasons for being happy. To her personally, the idea of love was so different from anything expressed in Nancy's letter that she could not feel that she would be happy herself under such conditions. Nancy was her friend and

chum, but it was Nancy's mother whom she chiefly admired, and privately she wondered not a little what Mrs. Pringle thought of her son-in-law-to-be.

The letters beguiled Joan for a time from her worry as to what she ought to do about the young officer she had seen talking to Colonel Guest, and who in her heart she was sure was identical with the Robert Forbes who had stolen the papers from John Standish. When at length she lay down to sleep the perplexities of the position came back upon her, and she was all the time worrying and worrying as to what she ought to do. Very little sleep came to her, and when she dozed her rest was broken by hideous dreams. Those she loved were in danger; it was all her fault; by stretching out her hand she could have stopped it all, but she could not stretch out her hand, and so the misery went on.

Morning found her waking unrefreshed, but determined to do something. She would go to Lady Huntly after all and tell her the whole story. It would be a huge relief to say it all and get some advice. How she longed for her father or her mother! Especially it was of her father she thought, Mr. Haysome's judgment was so sound.

It was one thing to resolve she would tell Lady Huntly of her trouble, but it was quite a different matter to get the chance to do it. Joan's work held her fast for the first hours of the morning, and, when

she did get an opportunity, Lady Huntly was out. She had gone over to the camp, so one of the nurses said, and she was not expected back until after lunch.

It was early in the afternoon, and Joan was off duty for a couple of hours. She was setting out for a walk when, turning the corner by the hospital kitchen, she met the officer whom she had seen talking to Colonel Guest.

CHAPTER XIII

The Next Thing

IT was only that morning when the hospital staff were having breakfast that the talk had turned on the spy trouble that was still going on. The authorities at the camp were perplexed and bothered because no one could put a finger on the leakage. It was plainly someone within the inner circle, as it were, who was playing the traitor. Men were looking at each other with suspicion, but though the wildest rumours were afloat there was no real indication from what quarter the trouble arose.

Joan had been thinking of all this talk as she started for her walk. If she were right in her identification of the officer as being the man who called himself Robert Forbes, then at once she jumped to the conclusion that it was from that direction the spy trouble came.

With this uppermost in her mind, it was to the last degree disconcerting to be so unexpectedly confronted by the man of whom she was thinking. Joan flushed hotly as the officer passed her by, and she wondered

what he would have said if her thoughts had been written on her face. She walked swiftly away, not caring much where she went if only she might get where she could think clearly. If only Lady Huntly had come back! Hark! that was the sound of a motor, so perhaps Lady Huntly was coming, and she, Joan, would get the chance for which she had been longing all the morning.

It was just then that two of her patients, who had been limping painfully along in the sunshine, turned into the track in which she was walking. Acting on impulse, Joan asked hurriedly: "Do you know that officer who has just turned the corner by the kitchen hut?"

"Why, yes," replied one of the convalescents, who was walking with a crutch and finding the process difficult, "that is Lieutenant Rodney Frost. He is the scientific expert attached to the camp, and a great swell in his way. He looks like a blooming Hun, don't you think?"

It was as if someone had poured a bucket of ice-cold water over Joan. That man Lieutenant Rodney Frost, the betrothed of Nancy Pringle! Oh, it surely, surely could not be! There was a sound in her ears as of rushing waters, and a great tumult filled her heart. She turned abruptly from the men, facing round as if she were going in pursuit of the man whom she had known by a name that was presumably not

his own, since he had another for ordinary use. What she really intended doing she could not have told, and at that moment the car came swiftly up to the house where Lady Huntly had her own private apartments, and stopped.

It was Lady Huntly then, and she had come back! There was a sob of utter thankfulness from Joan, and she hurried to the door through which Lady Huntly had passed on leaving the car. In her agitation she had not noticed whether anyone else was there; she never even thought of it, so intent was she on getting the burden of what she knew off her mind.

She passed into the house. There was a dark little entry inside that gave on to the room where Lady Huntly wrote letters and interviewed people who had business with her.

"If you please can I speak to you? There is trouble, spy-trouble, I think, and I want to get it off my mind as quickly as I can," blurted out Joan, marching up to Lady Huntly, who stood in the middle of the mean little room pulling off her long motor coat.

"What did you say? Spy-trouble? Pray what do you know of things of that sort?" demanded a voice from the gloom of the darkest corner, and Joan faced round with a start to find herself almost close to Colonel Guest.

"Oh, I did not know that you were here!" she exclaimed, and her heart beat so fast that its thumping

made her voice sound tremulous. "I wanted to talk to Lady Huntly because I am in such fearful trouble, and I did not like to come over to the camp to speak to you."

"Perhaps if you will tell your story, and tell it to the point, I shall be able to judge what is best to be done." The Colonel's tone was grim. He was a bit old-fashioned and conventional in his ways of thinking, and right down at the bottom of his heart he was disposed to regard these V.A.D. workers as a rather fast and unfeminine set of girls, admirable though their work might be, and indeed was. He thought his sister ought to keep the staff of her hospital on the level of upper servants, even though a duke's daughter was numbered among them.

Joan faced him now with no shrinking in her manner. She might quail inwardly, but she was not going to let him see it, and she began to speak in short concise sentences, clipping her words a little from sheer nervousness, but displaying no other sign of trembling.

"When I came over to the camp the other day—I mean yesterday—to bring those papers to you from Lady Huntly, you were talking to a young officer who was rather dark, and who had a scar over his left eyebrow. The sight of the officer made me feel rather anxious, for I believed him to be the same man who, back in the summer, stole valuable papers from a man who had been hurt. I did not like to speak of this to you. I have

taken a night to think about it. To-day I was walking past the kitchen hut when I came off duty, and I encountered the officer again. Two of our patients, whom I met just afterwards, told me that the officer was Lieutenant Rodney Frost, but before, when he took the papers, he gave his name as Robert Forbes."

"What papers were they?" demanded the colonel in no pleased tone. "Are you inferring that the man is a common thief?"

"The man who took the papers was supposed to be a German spy," said Joan in a low tone, and then she went white to the lips, for the anger of the colonel was a sight to see.

"Do you come here to denounce a man holding His Majesty's commission as a German spy? Have you any idea of the gravity of the charge you are making against this man? Girls are apt to say things one minute that they take back in the next, but that sort of thing will not do in the army." Colonel Guest was holding himself in by a great effort. If Joan had been a man he would have said very plainly what he thought of the statement she had made.

"I have suffered enough in my own person, because of the theft of those papers, which I might have prevented if only I had been prompt in doing what I had undertaken to do," said Joan, her voice growing steadier, and her manner more confident as she realized that she had taken the great plunge, and must go through with

things no matter what happened. "The man from whom the papers were stolen has lost his reputation, he has been degraded in every possible way, and he is at this moment serving as a common soldier, although he is a scientific expert."

"Tell me about it," commanded the Colonel, and the anger in his voice would have scared the last remnants of courage from Joan, if she had not been too desperate to think of herself at all.

She told him then of the accident in the Durling undercliff, when John Standish had been rescued from such dire peril and taken to her father's house. She went on with her story, sparing herself not at all in the telling, although it made her wince. The old pride was there, and the desire to be well thought of. But the heroic in her had risen to meet the demand upon it. She said that she had afterwards seen the man in the moving train, and had done her best to stop him but had failed.

"You are sure that Lieutenant Frost is the man?" asked the Colonel in a grating tone. Joan's story was too sensational, he told himself, and he was so annoyed that he began tugging papers out of his pockets in the hope of distracting his thoughts a little, and keeping him calm enough to deal with this hysterical miss in a befitting fashion. But he rather overdid the desire to appear detached and cool, for he gave the bundle of documents such a tug that the whole lot went flying on

to the floor as the elastic band holding them together burst.

Lady Huntly had slipped out of the room, leaving the two together, and Joan, with the instinct of ready helpfulness, sprang forward to assist him in picking up the scattered papers.

These papers were not all in the same handwriting. There were sheets covered with small crabbed characters, and directly Joan's gaze fell upon them she knew that she had seen them before. That was the writing of John Standish. She had seen him writing very often, when he was getting better from his injuries, in her father's house. It was a handwriting that, once seen, is not forgotten again, because of the character in it.

"Why, that is the writing of Mr. Standish, the man from whom the papers were stolen!" she cried, with dilating eyes; then she gave a sharp inarticulate cry, and, seizing a sheet more closely written over than the rest, she cried out in amazement: "These must be some of the very papers that were stolen, for see, there is the word *Dulcinite*. When Mr. Standish went off his head he was always raving about *Dulcinite*—it was a stuff that he had invented, I think, or at least he had improved upon it, and I know that the papers describing its manufacture were among the stolen lot."

A sudden quietness dropped upon the Colonel, and he shed his anger as a man might throw a garment aside. Those papers were not his, but belonged to

Lieutenant Frost, who had left them in the care of the Colonel only a few hours before. It was possible there might be something more than hysteria in the statement of this girl. At any rate, he meant to sift the matter pretty thoroughly. He might be slow in rousing himself to action, but once roused, he carried a thing through to the end without any halting or delay.

"This man, John Standish, is serving as a private soldier, you say? Do you know in what regiment?"

"He is here, in Salonika. He has been nursed in our hospital," said Joan, who had subsided into the chair which the Colonel had drawn close to the table for her, and was sitting in it feeling very weak and exhausted with the strain of telling her story.

"Here? Do you mean Standish the guide?" demanded the Colonel in growing amazement.

"Yes, he is the guide. He was brought to us with our first lot of wounded. I helped the doctor attend to him, but he did not recognize me; and I did not want him to, for I was so deadly ashamed of the way I had failed him in the past," admitted Joan, who was always honest in her statements, even when the honesty told against herself.

"Would he recognize Lieutenant Frost as being the man who stole the papers from him?" asked the Colonel.

"Oh, no!" said Joan. "Mr. Standish never saw the man who called himself Robert Forbes—at least he never saw him to know him. But of course Mr. Standish

would know his own handwriting, and he could tell you at once if these were some of the papers that were stolen from him that time when he was at Swanton."

"Humph! I suppose he would. Plainly, then, our next business is to get Standish here to settle the question. I wonder if that 'phone is usable this morning?"

"It was not, two hours ago. Shall I go and ask if the repairs are finished yet?" asked Joan. The telephone wire between the camp and the hospital was constantly in need of overhauling, and most frequently messages had to be sent by someone on a cycle.

Colonel Guest would not let Joan go. Instead, he sent an orderly, and spent the time in putting her through a stiff cross-examination concerning the matter of the stolen papers. Other people had refrained from blaming her, believing that she would have quite enough suffering from her own inner consciousness. Colonel Guest believed in rubbing things in, and in a few trenchant sentences he made her understand pretty thoroughly what was his opinion of a girl who stopped to buy herself a new hat when she had been sent on an errand of importance.

The orderly came back, saluted, and informed the Colonel that the wire was not in operation, though it was hoped that it would be ready for use in about two hours.

"By which time it won't matter to me whether the 'phone works or not," said the Colonel testily. Then

he wrote a note, and told the orderly to take it over to the camp himself, using the motor that was waiting, and he was to bring John Standish, the guide, back with him.

Away went the orderly, while Joan fidgeted in her chair, wondering if she had to stay where she was until the car came back from the camp. She wondered, too, what the Sister would say to her concerning her work if she did not turn up promptly when her off-duty time was up. But it was not for her to bother about little things like these; she had taken the great plunge, and now she must submit to be carried along on the stream of circumstance, only praying as she went that she might not be carried out of her depth completely.

In five minutes the orderly was back. "Please, sir, the car is not here."

"What do you mean?" demanded the Colonel, although the orderly had spoken plainly enough.

"The car is not here, sir; it went back to the camp about a quarter of an hour ago to take Lieutenant Frost."

Now, indeed, the Colonel was roused. The car was to have waited for him, and he was going to take the Lieutenant back with him. An expedition was to set out across the marshes as soon as he got back to camp, and John Standish was to guide the party through devious and dangerous ways to a hardly-beset outpost which had sent an urgent request for aid. Of course

it was possible that the zeal of the Lieutenant had outrun his discretion, and, finding the Colonel delayed, he had ventured to take matters in his own hands, and had gone off in this fashion in order to set out at the time appointed. Excess of zeal was, in the eyes of the Colonel, almost as wrong as want of it. Most certainly a very bad quarter of an hour would have been in store for Lieutenant Rodney Frost in an ordinary way. As it was, this hurried departure struck a deep note of suspicion in the mind of the Colonel, coming as it did just on the top of the revelation made by Joan. He wondered if the Lieutenant had recognized Joan as being in any way connected with the affair of the stolen papers, and so had thought it wisdom to make a bolt.

It was a time for quick decision. The one desire uppermost in the mind of Colonel Guest at that moment was to discover whether the expedition had left the camp for the plunge across the marshes. He knew that John Standish had been anxious to get clear away from camp with sufficient daylight to take him across the first dangerous bit to the place where the men could halt until the moon rose. He guessed that everything would be ready and waiting, so that when the Lieutenant arrived in the Colonel's motor the start would be made without delay. If only there had been another motor at the hospital this would not have mattered so badly. It would have been quite easy to overtake the men, even if he went back to camp first. Now, with no car avail-

able, it really looked as if things were against him in all directions. But this sort of thing made him only the more determined to get there somehow; and now he bestirred himself with more vigour than ever, while every moment he became more suspicious about the good faith of Lieutenant Frost. If the expedition had really started in the command of a man who was playing into the hands of the enemy, what might not be happening? The men who were so hardly put to it, out yonder beyond the swamps, would be in a far worse case should a traitor come to their rescue. Plainly the first thing to be done was to stop the expedition; and it did not take the Colonel long to decide that he was going to do it somehow, even if he had to peddle along the tracks on a push-bicycle.

He suddenly remembered that there was a motor-cycle at the hospital, and called for it to be got ready at once. Joan had been hovering in the background, not knowing whether she was to consider herself dismissed or not. When she heard the motor-cycle being called for, she came forward at once to ask if she might go with the Colonel, as she understood the machine better than Staff-Sergeant Brown, who was the only man just then available for the work.

"No, no; it is not work for a girl!" burst out the Colonel in a testy tone. "There is plenty of useful work in the world for women, without their wanting to career about the country on motor-cycles."

"May I get it ready for you?" asked Joan, knowing the whimsies of the cycle, and guessing that there might be trouble.

"No, no; surely you don't think yourself so much wiser than the men," said the Colonel; and his manner was so very decided that Joan retired feeling very thoroughly snubbed.

CHAPTER XIV

A Wild Ride

THERE was another hour before Joan should have gone on duty, but she was so shaken and unnerved by the strain of telling her story that she decided she simply could not go walking, however much she might need the exercise for the good of her health. It would hardly do to show herself in the ward before the proper time, however, for the nurse under whom she worked was a Tartar for discipline, and had a way of making probationers feel rather bad if they in any way failed to carry out the programme arranged for them. She was hesitating between going to her room to read for the next hour, or going to the kitchen to see if the cook would appreciate a little help, when she heard a run of hasty feet behind her, and turned to find that the orderly was doing his best to overtake her.

“If you please, Nurse, Staff-Sergeant Brown says will you kindly come round to the shed and help him to start that motor-bike. The Colonel wants to be off in five minutes, but the engine won’t fire.”

“Did Colonel Guest tell you to come for me?” asked

Joan, pausing for the man's reply. She had been too badly snubbed by the Colonel to risk going where she might not be really wanted.

"Why, no, the Colonel does not know yet that the thing won't start; but when he does there will be trouble, and that is why Staff-Sergeant Brown asked me to come for you; he said he knew that you would oblige."

"So I would, if I could. But the Colonel told me he did not want me to come, and I dare not go against his wishes," replied Joan; and she was conscious of some private elation at the thought of what the Colonel would feel, when he found that Brown could not get the motor-cycle to work.

"What shall I tell him, Nurse?" asked the orderly; and by his face Joan guessed that he was feeling real sympathy for the unfortunate staff-sergeant.

"Tell Brown that when the Colonel sends for me I will come at once," said Joan promptly. "I will walk up and down in front of this row of sheds, so that you will know where to find me."

The orderly saluted, then went off in a great hurry. Joan turned round and walked to the end of the sheds, then came slowly back again. Her heart was thumping at a great rate. Even supposing the Colonel sent for her to start the machine, it would not be of much use. The first time they had to stop there would be the same trouble, and they would just be stranded wherever the

stop might occur. She had done what she could, now there was nothing for it but to leave things alone. In her present frame of mind, the leaving seemed about the hardest work she had ever done. Faster and faster she walked, until her pace was very nearly a run; then she pulled herself up in a hurry. It was silly to give way and to lose control in this fashion; much better keep her strength until it was wanted, instead of fuming and wearing herself out.

Back came the orderly. "If you please, Nurse, the Colonel says will you come and help Brown to start the motor-bike, and he will be glad if you will come at once, so much time has been lost that he is afraid he won't reach the cross-track before the troop has passed."

"I will come," said Joan. And she followed the orderly, walking at a quick rate, and pressing her hand on her heart as she went, in order to still its thumping.

The Colonel was striding up and down beside the cycle, while the unfortunate Brown was on his knees doing something to the engine, and perspiring violently.

"I am sorry I drove you away just now, Miss Hay-some, for it seems that we cannot do without you," said the Colonel, turning to her with such an evident desire to climb down, that Joan promptly forgave him for all the hard things which had been said to her.

"I will see what I can do," she said cheerfully; and then she began to overhaul the engine with a quick understanding of its weaknesses which enabled her to

put her finger on the weak spot without delay. "I shall be six or seven minutes in putting the engine right, but we shall still be able to catch the troop, if you will let me drive." Joan did not stop to look at the Colonel as she spoke. It was not for her to glory in the fact that he could not get on without her just then. She was poking at this thing and pulling at that; she was calling to Brown for the tools she wanted, and working all the time with an absorbed air that showed she meant to put the thing through with the least possible delay.

The Colonel stamped up and down in a fine state of fume. He was a good soldier and a brave man. He was prepared to do his duty anywhere and everywhere. Now, when he found that it was out of reason for him to hope to overtake the troop without the help of a girl, he gave way just because he put his duty before his own ideas of the fitness of things. It was any port in a storm, and he was just then in a perfect hurly-burly of bad weather.

"It is plain that Brown does not understand the thing, and since there is no other man here who can do it, I am bound to ask you to help me out," he said, speaking with old-fashioned deference, and more than a little formality in his manner.

"I shall be very glad to help you," said Joan, making another dive at the engine. Then she straightened herself, emerging from her task with a black streak across her nose of which she was happily unaware. "The

engine will run now, I think. Would you like me to try it for half a mile first, or will you start straightaway and chance it?"

"Oh, we must chance it. Our only hope of stopping the men is to get away without any more delay," answered the Colonel. Then he packed himself into the side-car, where he was a rather tight fit, and Joan prepared to start the engine.

"You have no coat, you can't go like that," objected the Colonel, seeing that Joan was too lightly clad for a run of some miles.

"I don't feel cold very much, and it will hinder to get my coat," she said, not pausing in her work.

"Brown, let Miss Haysome have that coat," said the Colonel, waving an authoritative hand towards the coat which the staff-sergeant had shed in his desperate efforts to get the engine in working order.

Brown picked up the coat, holding it out in a rather apologetic fashion to Joan, who slipped her arms in the sleeves with a brief word of thanks, then turned to the engine again, too intent on her task to have any time to spare for wondering what sort of a figure she must cut in such a garment.

Sput, sput, sput, thud, thud, the thing was going all right! There was a sensation of positive rapture in Joan's heart as she careered down the bumpy track that led past the hospital buildings to the main road. The Colonel would certainly have to alter his opinion

as to the suitability of girls as riders of motor-cycles. How smoothly the engine was running! If only this state of things would last until the work was done, how thankful she would be! She bent to her task, and the machine forged ahead at increasing speed. She was no reckless driver, and she had not the slightest desire to turn bad corners at a record-breaking pace. Once or twice she had to turn to the Colonel for directions about the road. She had not been this way before, and the fact that she was on a strange route made her all the more careful in her driving, for of course she did not know what might be round the next turn.

It was about the most solitary way she had ever travelled. Not a house, not even the hut of a Vlach for mile after mile. The road went on across an untilled country, winding past clumps of low shrubs, some of which, even in this winter afternoon, gave off sweet odours that showed how truly beautiful they might be at a brighter part of the year. The way was taking them into the marsh country; there were wide pools, partly overgrown with sedges and broad-leaved flags. The road, which was now only a track, turned sharply to avoid a marshy strip of many acres in extent. The going was heavy now. Joan was forced to slow down, and to pick her way as it were, or they would certainly have come to grief before she could stop her engine. Then they turned into a

broader track much marked by many feet, and the Colonel cried out that this was the road from the camp, and judging by the marks that the troop had already passed.

"Perhaps we can overtake them if I go full speed now, the road here looks a little better," said Joan, who was getting a bit breathless.

"If we can't overhaul them in the next mile and a half, we shall be done," replied the Colonel, who was peering ahead with his eyes screwed up to two little slits. He was short-sighted, and he found he could see a little better when he screwed his eyes in this fashion. "The road turns in between two divisions of the lake at that point, and I really don't think that the machine could get along the ridge."

"Then we must overtake them somehow," said Joan, and she bent her energies to getting every ounce of power out of the thudding, sputtering engine.

"There is something ahead of us," cried the Colonel presently, and Joan lifted her gaze momentarily from the track to see what it was in front of them.

"I think it is a drove of sheep or goats, but certainly it is not men," she said. On they rushed, and now she was using a weird sort of hooter that brought the echoes out of the solitary places, causing clouds of waterfowl to rise from the marshes and from the reed-beds, while they filled the air with their discordant cries.

"There is a man with the animals. Stop, and let me talk to him," said the Colonel; and Joan slowed down, bringing the machine to a stand just before they reached the flock of sheep and the half-dozen goats which the solitary shepherd was driving onward into the swamps to some distant feeding-ground.

There was a wild rush from the two savage dogs which helped the shepherd with his flock. To the horror of the Colonel, they dashed straight at Joan, who fended them off with a couple of vigorous kicks, and then the Vlach called them to order in a tone so fierce that they subsided behind him, both of them growling about what they would do if only they had the chance.

The Colonel began to question the man, and although they did not know much of each other's speech, it was quite wonderful how well they contrived to understand. Since the armies of the Allies had been at Salonika, a mighty change had come over the country people. The men in khaki paid for what they had. The peasants, wringing a scanty existence from the barren soil, suddenly found a market for their produce close at their doors. The fact of being able to sell things, and to have the money for them, had a brightening effect on their intelligence.

This Vlach, a sinewy, dark man, with keen eyes under bushy, black eyebrows, told the Colonel that a troop of men on foot, sixty of them, had passed him not

more than half an hour ago, and had taken the ridge road between the two lakes. He described the officer in charge, mentioning the marks on his uniform, and adding to this that he had a deep scar above his left eyebrow.

"Only half an hour! Why, surely we could catch them," said Joan, who was strung up to do desperate deeds.

The Colonel looked at her dubiously. If she had been a man he would not have hesitated about pushing forward until he could go no farther. But a girl was different, and he wondered what her powers of endurance were like.

"Oh, please don't be thinking of me!" exclaimed Joan, who rightly read what was passing through his mind. "I can do everything that an ordinary man-driver would do for you, and I am quite ready to go on."

"You are a very courageous girl, and you would set an example in pluck to any man," said the Colonel, with a courtly inclination of his head which made Joan feel as if she wanted to blush at what was a very high compliment, coming as it did from such a quarter. "Yes, we will push on a bit farther, if you feel that you dare venture; but it is a frightfully dangerous place, and the lives of both of us will hang on your skill and courage in negotiating the bad bits."

"I will do my best," she said simply, and her

thoughts went off to the dear home-folk in far-away England. How little they knew of what might be in front of her! But she had come out to Salonika to do her bit and make good, so it was not her own personal fear that would turn her back.

CHAPTER XV

A Desperate Venture

THE Colonel paid the shepherd for his information, and Joan started her engine again. Very anxiously she listened to the throbbing now. It was mostly at starting that the thing proved eccentric. If anything went wrong now she would be hopelessly beaten, and the Colonel would be feeling that she was not much good after all.

Thud, thud, sput, sput, thud, thud! It was all right so far. Off the beaten road they rushed, and along the crown of a little ridge where was no road at all. Now they were in between two forests of bulrushes, through which the breeze rustled and whispered, making strange sounds as if an army lay in ambush there. Joan had to slow down to a regular crawl. There were very bad bits to be passed here; it would not do to have an accident. In places the track was so narrow that the side-car veered into the bog, and had to be dragged out by sheer skill of twisting and turning. Oh, without doubt it was very bad going! The light was fading, and Joan knew quite well that, try as she might, she

would not be able to drive over that track when darkness had fallen.

Since it was too late to go back, the only thing to be done was to go forward. Perhaps they would be able to reach the place where the night camp was to be made. The Colonel said there was a half-ruined house where the men would rest for the night. There would be a fire, and Joan thought that she would be quite comfortable sitting beside a fire of rushes until morning came. The chief thing was to make sure that they were on the right track to find the house, which was the abandoned home of a Vlach sod-cutter, who found, after the war broke out, that he could earn more money in a day by living in the town, than he could gain by a month of toil at sod-cutting.

The cycle swerved so violently that the Colonel had to catch at the side of the car to keep his balance. "Steady! you are doing very well; don't lose your nerve," he said, speaking with such unruffled calm that Joan was able to get a grip of herself again, and she slowed down a little more. There was an abrupt turn in the ridge a little farther on. She must be ready for that corner when it came, and also for what might lie beyond it. The reed-bed ended suddenly, and when the corner was turned, Joan saw a narrow ridge of earth running out between the lakes, water on either side of her, and the ridge so narrow that she wondered if there would be room for the wheels of the side-car to run

above the edge of the water. One glance she gave at the face of the Colonel. If she had seen any shrinking there, then her own courage might not have been equal to the strain upon it. Colonel Guest had faced death too many times to quail when the dark angel met him in the way of duty. Joan, looking at him, was amazed at the steadfast courage, the real exaltation of purpose which she saw in his expression. She choked back a lump in her throat, and then bent her gaze steadily on the ridge. She would not dare to look round again; their lives depended on her skill in guiding the cycle so that the wheels of the side-car did not slip into the water.

How her heart was thumping! There was a noise in her ears like the beating of the sea on a rocky shore. Surely it must be her fancy that the waves sounded so loud, for the waters of the lake were quite still. Then a mist came before her eyes, and an awful panic seized her lest she should not be able to see well enough to steer along the ridge. The light was fading faster now. She peered ahead in the gathering gloom. The track was growing wider for a little distance, so she quickened up speed and tore ahead as fast as she could go. There was another reed-bed showing in the distance. She was approaching it fast; perhaps the bad place ended there, and the going would be safer; if only she could reach the firmer ground before it grew dark, then she would stop and light the lamps. What was that just ahead? The ridge dipped suddenly. In the bottom of the dip

there showed a streak of water; it was a very narrow streak. Could she manage to ride over it?

One has to do desperate things sometimes. When there is no other way out, it is wonderful how one can manage to squeeze round a tight corner. Joan put on speed, the cycle rocked and bounced, she tore down the slope at a fearful rate; there was a bump, a bounce, a shiver went through the machine that nearly flung her off, and then they were mounting the next slope, rocking and swaying still, but happily the wheels were all on firm ground; the path grew wider, and the bad bit was passed.

A little farther on three ways branched from the track they were following. Here Joan brought the cycle to a stop, and, dismounting, stood peering at the ground to see if she could tell which track the men had taken. Judging by the distance they had come, it seemed pretty certain they could not be far away from the deserted house where the men were to shelter for the night. The difficulty was to know which path to take to reach the house, which the Colonel said was hidden away in the reed-beds. He had not been this way before, and he could not tell which path led to the house, and he had not known that the ridge was so dangerous.

He got out of the side-car and came to help Joan in lighting the lamps; then they both examined the muddy ground to find out by the footprints which way had to be taken.

To their surprise, every one of the three paths showed marks of tramping feet; only, in every case they went backward and forward, almost as if the men had been trying one way after another. The only thing to be done was to leave the cycle where it was, and to press forward, first along one path, and then along another, to find which way the men had really gone. With John Standish for a guide, it did seem strange that there should be such uncertainty as to the correct route, and the Colonel was more disturbed about it than he cared to admit.

To save time, Joan suggested that he should search one track while she searched another; but this he would not hear of. He did not choose to let her out of his sight in a place where, for aught he knew, danger might be lurking for the unwary.

For half a mile they tramped along one path, only to find that it ended abruptly in a swamp. So abruptly it ended, that Joan was almost in the morass before she realized where she was going, and it needed a sharp word of caution from the Colonel to make her take more care. She had been so intent on the tracking that she had forgotten to be watchful for herself, and she felt properly ashamed of her want of care. Back they went along the path to the place where they had left the cycle, but in the going they somehow wandered into another way, which led them out on to a wide, stony track, a strange piece of ground to find in that marshy

spot. It was maddening and bewildering to wander round in this manner. Joan could hear the Colonel snorting in a peculiarly exasperated fashion, but for a long time he said nothing at all. She had the funny feeling of being in a dream from which she would wake presently to find herself back at the hospital.

"Here is a track, let us follow this. We must not go very far though, for if we are wrong again, we shall have all the farther to come back," he said presently; and then he straightened up from his stooping position, and paused a moment to wipe his face. "I have been in a good many queer fixes in my time, but I do not remember ever having been in a stranger case than this. It is like a very bad nightmare."

"Just what I was thinking, and I was wondering how soon I should rouse to find myself back at the hospital, with someone knocking at the door to tell me it was time I waked up." Joan made her voice sound as cheery as possible, for she guessed how bad the Colonel must be feeling because she, a girl, was having such a hard bit to face in the way of duty.

"Humph!" grunted the Colonel. "I am afraid there is not much chance of our waking to find ourselves anywhere else than in these bewildering marshes. Hallo, here are footprints, and they are all going one way, so perhaps we have hit on the right track at last. Hallo, what is that—a light? Is it possible that we have hit on the night camp at last? Hallo, hallo there!"

There was no response to his shouting, though they could see the light plainly enough. They were off the path now—indeed there seemed to be no path; it had ended with startling abruptness, and they were toiling through long sedgy grass which at any moment might end in swamp. A heavy bird lurched into the air, rising almost from under their feet. Joan could have cried out because she was so scared, but she choked back the scream that almost escaped her, because she would not worry the Colonel, who was already badly bothered on her account.

"That looked like a vulture," remarked the Colonel. There was a young moon hanging low at the edge of a cloud, and he had been able to see the bird pretty plainly as it rose from the long grass.

"A vulture?" Try as she would, Joan could not repress a shiver, and she strained her eyes to follow the big bird in its flight, but it was already lost to view. The light ahead of them gleamed steadily, and they pressed on towards it, treading cautiously. Once Joan caught her foot and would have pitched headlong, but the Colonel caught her as she fell, and held her fast.

"Steady there!" he said in a warning tone. "We have enough disaster without facing any more. What a long way it seems to that light, and yet at first I thought it was quite near!"

"So did I," she answered. She was breathless from that just-escaped tumble, but still she managed to keep

her voice cheerful and unafraid. "We seem to have been walking a long way now, for the moon is very near its setting. What a good thing that we have the cycle lamps!"

"If they last, that is." There was a grim note in the Colonel's tone. He felt as if he were the sport of fate, and the process was not a pleasant one for him. "Why, that is the cycle lamp shining yonder, so we are just back to where we started."

"Of course it is the cycle lamp! I wonder we did not recognize it before. Now, we have missed the men, and have had all our trouble for nothing." Joan could have cried from sheer vexation to think she had wandered so long, and had got so tired, all to no purpose.

"The trouble is that these marsh paths are so terribly alike, that if we try again we may only have the same experience. You had better put your lamp out, Miss Haysome; then, if the others give out too, we can light this one. We must make sure of having a lamp, for it will be dark and no mistake, later on."

Joan promptly extinguished her lamp. If there was a little dismay in her heart at the suggestion of having to remain in the open marsh all night, she was careful to keep it to herself, and not by word or sign let it be known how bad she felt.

The long grass grew thicker; they plunged right into a small pool of green slimy water, then scrambled out on the other side, and climbed a ridge of firm ground;

from this they passed to a patch of softer mould where, by some strange freak, no grass grew. The light of the lamp carried by the Colonel flung its rays on the ground, and he cried out in amazement that some sort of a struggle had been taking place here, for on all sides there were marks of deep footprints and sliding footprints, and blurred tracks as if heavy bodies had been dragged to and fro.

"What has happened?" cried Joan. "Why, it looks just as if a fight had taken place here!"

"That is just about what it is," replied the Colonel, who wished that Joan at that moment were a thousand miles away. If the enemy had crept in through the lines of defences, and was abroad in the marshes to-night, what was he to do with a girl in his charge? He wished, oh, how he wished that he had never let Joan mount that motor-cycle! Of course it was no work for a girl. Certainly this one had shown the skill and discretion of a man in her driving, but one could not get past the fact that she was a girl, and it was war time.

"What is that?" asked Joan sharply, and now indeed there was a note of actual fear in her voice. The light from the Colonel's lamp had fallen on something that lay near to a clump of tall reeds.

The Colonel walked up to the something, bent down and turned it over. He flashed the light of his lamp upon it, and then he said: "It is a man. I don't think

he is dead. I wonder how long he has been lying here? Why, it is only a dozen yards or so from the cycle. He must have been here when we were here before."

"Who is it?" asked Joan, and now her voice would shake in spite of herself.

CHAPTER XVI

Waiting

"I CAN'T tell until I get some of the mud off his face," answered the Colonel; and taking out his handkerchief he began scraping away at the mud, which was so plastered on the face of the poor fellow that it was passing wonderful he was able to breathe at all.

Joan was on her knees now, holding the lamp while the Colonel scraped and wiped at the countenance of the unconscious figure on the ground. He looked as if he had been rolled over and over in the mud, so liberally was it spread all over his person, from his hair to his boots. He groaned feebly; and to Joan the sound brought real happiness, for it showed plainly he was still alive, and she had only half-believed the Colonel when he said the man was not dead.

"Why, great Scott, it is John Standish, the guide!" exclaimed the Colonel, as a bandage about the jaw showed under the thick top crust of mud.

"Ah!" The wild beating of Joan's heart told her that the Colonel was right. There are some things that do not need words to explain them, and this was one of

them. She had been sure that it was John, from the first minute when she had caught sight of that huddled figure lying there in the shadow of the clump of reeds.

"It is Standish. Then where are the men?" The Colonel's anxiety for the safety of the troop made him for the moment lose sight of the need of the man at his feet. What mysterious tragedy had been taking place out here in the reed-beds? and why, oh why, had he and Joan been wandering so long, following misleading footprints, while this man lay in such sorry case close to where they had stopped at first?

There could be no answer to these questions until the man on the ground had recovered sufficiently to tell them what had been taking place. The Colonel made a hasty examination of the man's condition, and then he cried out in surprise, because the poor fellow had been so beaten, bruised, and knocked about, that it was passing wonderful there was any life left in him at all. As the ground where he was lying was so damp, the Colonel and Joan moved the poor fellow up to the drier track where the cycle stood. They took a rug and a cushion from the side-car, and made him as comfortable as they could; then the Colonel took the lamp and went off to see if he could find out what had become of the rest of the men of the troop. He told Joan he would not go very far, but that he would just wander round, in the hope of finding some clue to the mystery of it all.

He expected to find some dead men lying near where they had found the unconscious figure of John Standish, and he did not want Joan to be with him when he found them. The puzzle to him was that although John was so battered, there were no bayonet thrusts or bullet wounds that he could find. This gave a strange colour to the affair. It was almost as if the poor fellow had been deliberately set upon, and beaten almost to death, but it was not warfare as he had ever known it. He wondered if a party of brigands might have set upon the guide for purposes of plunder. In such a case, what were the rest of the troop doing? Where had the others gone, leaving their comrade lying on the ground in such a plight; and had the revelations of Joan regarding Lieutenant Frost anything to do with it?

Up and down he searched, and round and round that clump of tall reeds near which the man had been found. He even plunged into the bed at one part where it looked to be beaten down, but he did not find anything, and presently he went back to Joan more puzzled than ever.

"If only we had something to give the poor fellow!" cried Joan, who had been attending to John Standish, using every scrap of the knowledge she possessed to make him more comfortable. She had washed his face by dipping her handkerchief in a puddle of water; she had removed the caked mud from his ears, and she had done all she could to bring him back to con-

sciousness, but although he moaned sometimes, he did not rouse or seem to know that anyone was tending him.

"I believe that I have a drop of brandy-and-water in my flask," replied the Colonel, making a dive into first one pocket and then another in order to find it. Joan held the head of the man while the Colonel carefully poured a little of the spirit into his mouth. At first he did not seem able to swallow. After repeated attempts, however, they found he could feebly gulp a little down, and then they waited. There was only a very little brandy in the flask, and the hours of the night stretching before them were very long indeed; it would be necessary to husband that drop of spirit most carefully if they were to keep life in the man.

"Do you think if we lifted him into the side-car I could venture to drive very slowly across the ridge?" Joan asked. She was so desperately afraid that John Standish would die, unless they could get help to him, that she was quite prepared to face what seemed a sheer impossibility for his sake.

"I am afraid it is of no use to try—and see, the lamps are going out." The Colonel's tone had a grim note in it as the lamp on the cycle flickered up wildly and then went out. Next, the one he had brought back with him from his futile search sputtered and went out also. Now they were left with only the one which Joan had previously extinguished, and this she did not dare light

again at present, through fear lest a greater need should arise later on, before dawn broke again.

"Then we must just stay where we are, and make the best of it," said Joan, and if her voice did not sound cheerful it was not for want of trying. Then she sat down on the ground, and drew the head of the wounded man on to her lap. He had to be taken care of. In the dark she would not even know if he were still breathing unless she held him close. How very dark it was! And what weird sounds came from the reed-beds! She could have declared that someone was laughing at her quite close at hand, yet it was only the night breeze stirring the dried reeds as it passed.

The Colonel paced up and down at a little distance. Joan guessed that he was doing sentry-go, and she herself was straining her ears to catch the faintest sound of approaching steps.

The man who lay with his head resting on her lap did not move or stir. He was still alive, she knew, for she could hear him breathe. But he was so cold, she tried to rub some life into him, chafing his face and hands until her own cold hands glowed with warmth. At least it kept her warm, and it must do him a little good too. After a time she found he stirred slightly, and turning his head to one side, he seemed to sleep. She was more comforted than she could express even to herself. It was as if she was giving of her abundant life to quicken his flagging vitality. She had done him

so much harm in the past by her carelessness and want of thought, that now it was unspeakably sweet to feel that she might be keeping life in him.

Presently the Colonel came to have a look at him. "How goes the poor fellow now? Are you very stiff holding him like that? Would you like me to take him for awhile? You could take my place walking up and down. I think that one of us ought to be on watch, for in circumstances like these one can't be too careful."

"I am not tired of holding him, thank you, and I am even contriving to massage a little life into his face and hands. He was so very cold and damp, but now he is beginning to glow. Shall we give him a little more of the brandy?"

"There is only a drain, he had better have it all. I struck a match just now, and saw that it would be daylight in about three hours. Can you hold out for so long, Miss Haysome? You have been fine and courageous so far."

"Without doubt I can hold out, but what about you?" she asked. She knew that, despite his energy, the Colonel was by no means a strong man. He had had some very bad illnesses in his time, and Lady Huntly said that he always suffered heavily when he had night duty of any sort.

"I am an old soldier," he answered briefly, and then he went back to his pacing up and down. Joan put out the lamp again. The Colonel had lighted it when he

came to give the last of the brandy to John, but Joan felt she dare not keep it alight through fear lest it should fail them. It was one thing to sit in the dark and to know that she could have a light if she needed it very badly; but it was quite another thing to feel that the lamp had burned itself out, and that, come what might, she could not have a light however sorely she might want it.

Had three hours ever seemed so long before? Joan, straining her eyes looking for the first lifting of the gloom, saw strange gleams of pale phosphorescent brightness showing over the waters of the lake. The Vlachs called these lights ghost-gleams, and believed that they were spirits of the departed come back to haunt the scenes of their earthly life. There was an old Vlach who came most days to the hospital, and with whom she had been able to talk a little because he had picked up a smattering of English, while she in her turn had managed to get some idea of his dialect. This old fellow had told her that after his only son had been slain by a Turk, the ghost-light came every night for a long time, and was the greatest comfort to the bereaved mother and himself. Joan had listened to him, and had never hinted at disbelief in his story, knowing that to him ignorance was bliss, and that the person who made him understand that the light was only the result of the poisonous marsh gases would add a deeper sorrow to his bereavement.

She was thinking of the old man now, and she was wondering how many brave men had given up their lives in that dreary region. There had been heavy fighting in past years in that lonely border country, there might be heavy fighting still, but it would be hard to find anything more weird and mysterious than the situation in which she and the Colonel found themselves that night.

"Are you there?" she called presently. It was some time since she had heard the steps of the Colonel passing and repassing. A feeling of intolerable loneliness had settled down upon her, and she fancied that the breathing of the man whom she was holding had grown fainter and more irregular.

"Yes, what is the matter? Have you heard anything, any sound of approach?" The Colonel came up at a quick rate, but he spoke in an undertone. If she had heard anything, it did not seem worth while to announce their whereabouts too soon, since they would not know whether it was friend or foe who might be near.

"I have heard nothing," she answered, and was even a little ashamed of having called to him. "But Mr. Standish is not breathing very steadily, and his pulse seems so irregular that I was a little afraid."

"Poor little girl!" he said kindly. "It is not very surprising if you are afraid; you have had ample excuse for fear to-night. I will light the lamp again, and you

had better keep it alight now. It will be daylight in about half an hour, or at least day will be beginning to dawn. No, I don't think he is going to peg out. His pulse may be low through want of nourishment, but he is holding his own. The testing time will be when we try to move him. I own I don't fancy the thought of that journey back to camp."

"That will not be so bad as this," she answered, and there was a stirring of hope in her voice because daylight was not far off. "It is the sitting still and not being able to do anything for him that I find so trying. Going back to camp I shall have to work hard, and that will help me to bear things."

The Colonel laughed in a rather mirthless fashion. "You were plainly wasted on the kitchen staff, Miss Haysome, for you have a braver spirit than most men. Now you are going to be courageous a little longer, and you will have to bear a little more sitting still. Even though John Standish may die because of the waiting, I must make one more effort to find out what has become of that troop of men; for, remember, it is the guide who has been knocked out of count, and this is not the sort of country where one may go very far without a guide."

Joan uttered no word of protest, but it seemed to her that all her courage turned to water when at length a tinge of grey stole across the black gloom of the night, and the Colonel bade her good-bye, saying that he would be back as soon as he possibly could.

The grey grew lighter and lighter. It was daylight at last. Joan sat tense and rigid; the head on her lap seemed to grow heavier and heavier. What would the Colonel find? How long would he be before he returned?

Suddenly there was a run of hasty feet, and a hoarse shout, which made Joan spring up in all haste, while the head she was holding slid to the ground. Something had happened, but what?

CHAPTER XVII

A Strange Story

"COLONEL GUEST! Colonel Guest!" called Joan in urgent tones, and then was immediately ashamed because of the sound of panic in her voice. It was bad enough to be afraid, but oh! it was ten times worse to show her fear in this silly fashion.

"I am coming. What is the matter?" It was the Colonel who spoke, and then Joan realized that it was he who was coming at a run, and she was promptly more ashamed than ever.

"I heard someone running, and I was silly enough to feel downright scared about it. Of course I might have known that it was you." While she talked, Joan was gathering John's head into the shelter of her arms again. She had let him slide to the ground when she sprang up, and now she was afraid lest he had been hurt.

"I had been gone longer than I meant to be, that was why I ran. Now we have got to lift that poor chap into the side-car if we can; and when we have succeeded in doing that, I will hang on somehow and

somewhere, while you drive, and God send us the skill to pass the ridge in safety! You will need a cool head for the task of driving with such a load, and you must not let your nerves get the better of you."

Joan nodded by way of answer; then she made haste to put the cushion in the side-car, after which she came round to the other side of John to help the Colonel in lifting him.

"Did you find anything, or anybody?" she asked; then she shivered, for she expected him to say that he had found some of the men lying dead.

"Never a sign of anyone, living or dead," he answered. "I was never more surprised and puzzled in my life. What it all means I can't imagine. The men certainly could not make their way across the marshes without a guide, yet we find that guide lying battered, bruised, and helpless, and never another man near him. Where are the other men, and why did they go off leaving this poor fellow in such a plight?"

As Joan could not answer the question, she kept silent, stooping when the Colonel stooped, and lifting when he told her. Already her enforced training at the hospital was bearing fruit—she could lift more easily. She could even give the Colonel a word of advice when it came to the question of getting the injured man into the side-car. She was thinking that John Standish was really the most unfortunate man of her acquaintance. This was the third time that he

had been thrust upon her care and kindness in an unconscious condition. All the maternal part of her nature was roused to care for him in his helplessness, for was he not a victim, and does not every woman worthy the name strive to cherish the victims in life's battles?

The Colonel puffed and panted. He snorted with so much energy when at length the task was accomplished, that Joan would have been tickled into laughter if she had not just then been feeling so terribly flat and cold. The lifting had tried her; she was worn out for want of food and sleep; but chiefest of all, she was strung up with dread at the thought of the task in front of her, when she would have to drive the cycle along that dangerous track between the two lakes. Could she do it? Looking at the prospect as she tucked the rug about the unconscious man, Joan decided that she had not enough nerve for the business. No one had more than a certain amount of strength—she had reached her limit, and could do no more.

"Poor fellow, he is very near collapse!" murmured the Colonel as he bent over John. "If we can't get him where he can have help in two hours or so, we might as well leave him where he is, to die in peace. He is pretty near the end of his suffering now, and it seems a bit cruel to disturb him so badly, and to jolt him over the rough tracks as we shall have to do."

"Oh, but we must save him, we must!" cried Joan,

and her courage came back with a rush because of the need there was for action. "We shall not be long in getting off now, and once the ridge is passed, I will drive like the wind. Are you ready for me to start the engine?"

"Yes, quite ready. When the thing begins to move, I will spread myself over Standish a bit. I can hang on so, and it will shield him a little from the wind. Ah, it is going to rain! What a mercy it did not start a few hours ago! We should have been in a pickle then."

Joan bent her energies to the task of getting the cycle under way. Suppose it went wrong, whatever would she do? There is no sense in meeting trouble half-way. For once, that valuable but eccentric machine made up its mind to run properly. The engine began to throb, Joan sprang to her place, and the Colonel supporting himself face downwards above the man in the side-car, the machine moved out on to the ridge between the lakes, and the perilous journey was begun.

Now that the strain was upon her, Joan forgot her dread of it. Indeed, she was so absorbed in her task that she forgot everything save the need of the moment. The rain was coming down fast, and it bothered her not a little, for it seemed to obscure her vision, though, doubtless, this was due more to overstrained nerves than to anything else.

There was the dangerous dip just in front of her;

if she could get safely past that, nothing else would seem very bad. But could she? As she put on speed the overladen side-car swayed to a dangerous angle; it was only by the most adroit movement that Joan succeeded in averting disaster. Still, it was averted. The cycle rushed down the slope at a great rate; she drew a breath of relief, thinking that she was through with that bad bit, when there was another bad swerve, a catch, an awful bump, and then with throbs and jolts the thing came to a stand right across the narrow line of water, which here broke the ridge in two.

What was to be done? It would be a task beyond the power of Joan and the Colonel to push the machine all the way along the ridge; they might get it far enough up the slope to start the engine, and by passing the bad bit at a rush, get carried part of the way up the ascent by their own momentum. It was a desperate venture; but something had to be done, and quickly. A glance at the face of John showed a grey shadow there which frightened Joan, and a chill fear gripped her lest she should be too late after all. If John Standish died on the way back to the camp, she felt that she would never be happy again. It was the fear and the dread of his collapse that made her able to do and to dare just now.

"If you get off, I think I can manage to mount the rise, then I will wait for you farther on, where the ridge is wider," she said, as she surveyed the bit in front of

her, and realized how badly she was overweighted considering the road.

"I won't mount again until we have passed the ridge," answered the Colonel. "I will help you start, then follow on behind as fast as I can, so that you won't have to wait long for me. Can we run her back a few yards, do you think? It will be easier to start if we can."

The ground was so soft that the running back was a hard and painful process, but it was accomplished in due course. Joan started her engine again, and found that it was running all right. She managed to hit the channel just at the narrowest part, and succeeded in getting through, though the side-car swerved dangerously; then she rushed the pace to mount the slope, and a minute later was speeding along the top of the ridge, doing her best to keep her wheels on the dry ground, and straining every nerve for the hard task in front of her. It had been hard enough to manage the passage of that perilous path when the Colonel had been there to help her with his quick eye and ready judgment. Now she was alone, for the unconscious man in the side-car did not count. Oh, the terror of that journey! She did not dare go very slowly for fear that she would not be able to keep going; she was so weary that her vision was clouded, there was the sound of roaring waters in her ears again. Would she reach the end of the ridge without disaster? Sometimes the temptation was upon her to drive straight on into the water,

and just let it end so. With all her might she hung on to the poor shreds of her self-control, and she took the curves when they came, as coolly as if she were driving on an easy and pleasant road. But the strain was the most awful thing she had ever borne. Drops of water that had nothing to do with the falling rain gathered on her forehead, and splashed down on to the sleeves of the Staff-Sergeant's jacket.

She wondered that she could be hot enough to perspire like that, and yet feel so cold inside. There was the end of the ridge at last! A sob of thankfulness came into her throat as the track turned in amongst the reed-beds; the cold grey waters of the lakes were behind her, and she brought the cycle to a stand to wait for the Colonel. What a solitary place it was! There was no sign of life anywhere. If only some shepherd had come along with his flock, there might have been a chance of getting a drop of mastic for the sufferer. Mastic is a fiery spirit largely consumed by the dwellers in that sparsely-populated region. Most of the shepherds carry mastic with them when they are out with their flocks. It is coarse, pungent, and nauseous to the unaccustomed, but she thought it would whip the flagging energies and stir the feeble pulses of the man who lay so inert in the side-car, with the grey shadow deepening on his face.

What a long time it took the Colonel to catch up! In his place Joan was sure that she would have done

the journey more quickly. Leaving the machine, she ran back to where the track bent round the angle of the reed-beds, and then she was frightened because she could not see him coming. Then she saw that he was on the ground, crouching as if doing something to his boot, and her impatience rose to angry panic. Was John Standish to lose his life just because a man's boot had come unfastened? Oh, the irony of it all! She ran out on the ridge, waving her arms, and shouting wildly: "Oh, make haste, please make haste! I am sure that Mr. Standish is very near to collapse, and every minute counts."

"I know it does; that is why I am trying to bind my foot up a bit, so that walking shall be less of an impossibility." The Colonel spoke quietly, but Joan, looking at him, thought how haggard he was, and wondered what was the matter.

"You have hurt your foot; how?" Down on her knees she plumped, wondering if there was any end to the disasters of that unfortunate journey.

"I slipped and sprained it a bit when we were pushing to get that cycle started. No, I won't have it undone, thank you; it would waste too much time. Now that it is bound tighter, the pain will be more bearable. Give me your arm, and I shall manage to get over this last bit without much more delay."

"Shall I run the cycle back for you? I could do it all right, I am sure that I could." Joan was keenly

anxious. She wondered what was happening round the bend of the reed-beds where the cycle had been left. She wondered, too, whether Colonel Guest would manage to walk so far. But between her crowding worries she did lose sight of her own fatigue, and the exhaustion that made her task of driving so hard.

"I am doing famously, thank you," he answered. "It is a shame to make a crutch of you in this fashion. But there seems no help for it. Thank Heaven, here we are, and our man is still holding on!"

"I had been wishing that we could meet a shepherd, and beg a drink of mastic for him," said Joan as she helped the Colonel to mount the side-car.

"You would have finished him, to a dead certainty, if you had poured any of that stuff down his neck. Why, it is as near poison as you can get. Lucky for you, and still more lucky for him, that no shepherd was passing this way before I got here! That is right. I shall do now. If I say things that don't sound complimentary when you bump us over stones and into ruts, you must just feel charitable and forgive me."

Joan smiled in a rather wan fashion. She was feeling at that moment that it did not matter in the least what the Colonel might choose to say to her on the way home, for she would be so taken up with her heavy task of driving that she would have no attention to bestow on his conversation.

The engine, having behaved so well before, did not

respond this time. Three or four ineffectual starts she made, and then, being extra desperate, she managed to get the engine running. There was no speed-limit to care about; there was, in fact, nothing that mattered except to reach the hospital as quickly as she could possibly contrive to do so.

Not a soul did she meet in all that long journey, with her body crouched low over the handle-bars, and her eyes straining to see the road ahead of her. She forced the pace to the utmost capacity of the machine.

At last! There were the first little houses of the hospital visible. Joan started her raucous hooter, and came whirling down the lane between the buildings like a small cyclone. An orderly came running out to meet her, and then she saw Lady Huntly appear at the door of head-quarters. It was Staff-Sergeant Brown who was closest at hand when the cycle stopped and Joan tumbled off. She was so worn now that there was no spring in her movements, and she would have come a cropper on the ground if Brown had not caught her and steadied her on her feet.

"Help the Colonel, please; he has hurt his ankle, and he must be in fearful pain," she said urgently, for Colonel Guest was getting off the side-car as quickly as he could. There was only one orderly within call, but he coming to the help of Staff-Sergeant Brown, the two between them lifted the Colonel right off the side-car, and helped him to the bench which stood in

front of the nearest shed. Then they came to lift John Standish out also, and laid him on a stretcher, which one of the convalescents had hurried to bring.

"Don't bother about me, nor yet about Miss Hay-some; look after that poor chap first—it is a matter of moments with him now," said the Colonel, as Lady Huntly advanced upon him, full of anxiety as to his condition. He waved his hand impatiently as he spoke, and she hurried away to help with John Standish, who was plainly in a very bad way indeed.

Joan stood leaning against the cycle, too dazed and spent to do anything towards helping herself. She knew there were plenty of people to care for John, and she knew very well that she herself had no power or strength to lift a finger for him. The thing that puzzled her was as to how she would manage to walk from where she was standing to her room, which was in one of the small houses farther along the lane. She could see the place from where she stood—a queer little one-storied hut, with wooden shutters painted a violent blue. In her present frame of mind, to get there seemed as much of an impossible feat as to get to her father's house in the pleasant suburbs of Birmingham. In fact, she had such a vision of her home bedroom just then, that it seemed to her she could just walk in at the familiar door, if only she could muster the energy to walk somewhere, or to do something, she was not quite sure what.

“Just leave holding that handle-bar and sit down, dear; we will do the rest,” said a kind voice in Joan’s ears; and she gazed stupidly at the speaker, who was one of the nurses, but she did not attempt to do as she was told. If she left her desperate clutch of the machine she would fall down, and there was no one to pick her up again. Everyone had so much else to do. Indeed, she was sure that she ought to rouse herself to be ready for her work: they were so short of nurses at the hospital, and she had been so long off duty. Of course, being so ignorant, she was not of very much use in the wards; indeed, her proper place was in the kitchen preparing meals for the patients and the staff, washing dirty crockery, and doing all the other drudgery that had to be done. But the convalescent patients could muddle round in the kitchen, and she could be hands and feet for the overtaxed nurses in the small wards that were so inconvenient and awkward for nursing purposes.

Someone laid forcible hold of her hands, and pulled her clutch from her machine. She tried to resist, murmuring that it was quite time she went on duty, and that the Sister would not like it if she failed to appear at the proper hour. But the someone had more strength than she had, so it seemed wisest to give way. She was dimly conscious of being seated in a carrying chair and borne away to her own room. She roused a little then, for someone was holding a cup of steaming beef-tea

to her lips, and it tasted fairly delicious. But she was so very tired that she nearly fell asleep drinking it, and then rest came to her. It was only broken rest at first, for in her sleep she was trying to drive along that fearful ridge between the lakes, and she was constantly failing—either the cycle stuck and would not move, or it rushed on swerving violently, and plunged her into icy-cold water. Oh, the cold of that water! Then someone would pull her out, and scorch her at an invisible fire. Presently the torture ceased, and she slept soundly for many hours. Indeed, it was night when she awoke, and the feeble light of the lamp burning in her room made her think of last night and the waning cycle lamps, which had given out when they were so badly needed.

"Why, I am in bed!" she exclaimed in great surprise, for her first waking thought had been that she was still keeping vigil out yonder in the Betchik marshes.

"Of course you are in bed. Where did you think you were?" asked a familiar voice; and Joan looked round to find Nurse Moira sitting in a chair by the side of her cot. Nurse Moira was waiting to be transferred to the base, from where she would be sent home to England, for the doctors had decided that her health would not stand the ravages of malaria. She had undertaken to look after Joan, being mindful of the debt of gratitude she owed, because Joan had so carefully looked after her.

"I thought I was out in the marshes still, and that I should have to drive along that ridge again before we could get back here," answered Joan, and there was a quavering note in her voice. The terror of last night and the desperate strain of the journeys had taken her strength. Then she made a hasty movement, and asked eagerly: "How is the man we brought back, and why was it he was left like that?"

Nurse Moira shook her head. "He is alive, that is about all that can be said of him. He cannot move or speak, and so we do not know any more than when you found him."

"Has nothing been heard of the others yet?" cried Joan, starting up. "Why, I have been asleep such a long time; surely some news must have come to hand about them."

"No," replied the nurse. "It is only about half an hour ago that Lady Huntly was here, and she said that Colonel Guest had just 'phoned through to know how you were getting on. Yes, the wire is in working order for a few hours, and so we are not so hopelessly cut off. It was working when you got back yesterday. The Colonel 'phoned for a car to come over for him, and he went off to the camp without staying to have his foot attended to. A patrol went off to the marsh country at once, and two hours later another lot set out. No news has come from either lot, so of course they are still searching. But you must go to sleep now. I have

told you all that concerns you; now you can rest in peace and comfort."

"No, I cannot!" exclaimed Joan with feverish energy. "I must get up and be ready to go on duty. Think for yourself how many hours it is since I have done anything, and we so rushed with work."

"Sister said that you were to stay in bed until morning, and that you were not to get up until she had seen you," Nurse Moira said quietly. Then, finding that Joan looked mutinous still, she added quietly: "The first duty of a nurse is to obey. Prompt obedience gives less trouble in the end, as I have sad cause to know, so you had better lie still and go to sleep again."

Joan nodded, and lay still. She knew why the bitterness had come into Nurse Moira's voice. When this nurse had been stricken down with malaria she had been told to keep in bed, even after she was beginning to get better; but, being energetic, and opinionated, she had chosen to disobey, and to get up under the false impression that she was being self-sacrificing and good, when really she was only troublesome. The result of this disobedience was a severe relapse, from which she had not recovered, and which would probably make an invalid of her for some years to come.

Before Joan had thought it all out, and had come to any clear ideas as to the difference between obstinacy and self-sacrifice, she had fallen asleep again, and she did not wake until daylight. Then she was so much

better that the Sister permitted her to get up, and to go on duty in the wards, where she was so sorely needed. She was fearfully stiff and sore, her head was as empty as a head could be, but she was able to creep about and to do her part.

John Standish still lived, but he had not spoken, and the mystery of his condition was unsolved still.

CHAPTER XVIII

Hard to Bear

THE night nurse had had so many bad cases that neither she nor her assistant, Miss Gregory, had had time to do the usual clearing up from the night, before the day staff came on duty. The nurse was so fearfully worn with the long strain of her work that the Sister sent her off duty at the proper time, but Miss Gregory was told to stay and help Joan clear up the houses, and wash the crockery that had been used during the night.

"I am really glad to stay this morning," said Miss Gregory, who was supposed to be dusting, but was in reality flicking at things with a duster, which was a little way she had. "Directly I heard that you were well enough to come on duty this morning, I left off feeling tired, for I said to myself it would be worth anything to help clear up, and listen to you talking about your doings when you were out with the Colonel."

"Suppose I do not feel inclined to talk, what then?" asked Joan, and she stooped painfully to get at the lower shelf of the stand by the door. Stacks of enam-

elled cups were kept on this lower shelf. Most of them were dirty, but the aggravating part of the matter was that the soiled cups had been stacked with the clean ones, and there was nothing for it but to sort out the lot and rearrange every one of them. It was the worst of the untrained labour that it would not take the little care in arranging, that would have made all the difference to the work later on. Joan knew very well that this was a piece of Miss Gregory's carelessness, and it did not please her that she should have to put it straight herself.

Miss Gregory laughed. She had really a pleasing laugh, and she was a nice friendly girl. The trouble was that she was so fearfully irresponsible that it was useless to think of depending on her to do things properly. She had a good heart, but no strength of will or steadiness of purpose to make what she did of real value to anyone. "I am sure that you will talk to me when you realize how very badly I want to know all about your doings. It must have been most thrilling to have had an adventure like that. You were wandering about all night, lost in the marshes, weren't you?"

Joan sighed, and stooped for another pile of cups. Miss Gregory's chatter would not have bothered her so much, if it had not been that she felt so done up by the strain of what she had been through. The mere mechanical work of washing dirty cups and basins, of dusting and clearing up, did not affect her; she had

the bodily strength to stand the racket of this. When it came to talking about the doings of her night of strenuous endeavour, it was quite a different thing. So she just said nothing at all, because that really seemed the easiest way out of it.

Miss Gregory dashed aimlessly to and fro. She picked up a big door-mat, and carried it out for an orderly to beat; then she came in again, and started telling Joan of her own doings. "Corporal Smart was awful last night. We had two men to hold him. They were men from Number Four house. One had a shattered wrist, so as far as holding went he was only half a man; but he was really splendid. When he could not manage by holding Smart with one hand, he just sat upon him. The other man had a wounded foot, so he also was handicapped; but they took the bother off me, and that was the principal thing so far as I was concerned. Oh, dearie me, the night work is trying! I get so jumpy in my nerves from midnight on to four o'clock. It was a real comfort to have those two men from Number Four house for company last night. They were talking such a lot about John Standish, too, so of course I found it mighty interesting."

Joan faced round sharply. "What were they saying about John Standish?" she asked, and then could have bitten her tongue with vexation because of the indiscreet question. After all, what did it matter to her what people said of the guide? She was nothing to him, and

he was nothing to her. The past was past. She could not alter that stupendous blunder of hers. She might sorrow because of it. She might even sit in figurative dust and ashes for the remainder of her life, because she had wrecked a man's career, but that would not alter matters. The wisest thing to do was to bear her pain in secret, and not flaunt her trouble in the eyes of the frankly curious.

Miss Gregory giggled. Then she gave another flick with her duster, but missing the spot at which she aimed, she brought a pile of plates down with a resounding bang. It was lucky, indeed, for her that the plates, like most of the other utensils on use in the wards, were of enamelled ware. "They were saying among other things that John Standish would have been an officer to-day, and with a fine standing in the army, if it had not been that his career had been ruined, absolutely ruined by a girl. Oh, the horrid, horrid thing to do harm to a fine good man like that! I wish I knew her. I should really enjoy telling her what I thought of her!"

Joan was on her knees now. She was stacking the clean cups right at the back of the stand, and the task appeared to absorb all her energies. She was secretly resentful that John Standish should have talked about the harm a girl in her blundering ignorance had wrought him. She thought, too, he might have remembered that the girl had saved his life, and she certainly had not

meant to do him harm. Only the night before last she had done her utmost for him. She had faced risks on the homeward journey that she could not have taken if she had not been so desperately eager to give him a chance of life. So it was hard, cruelly hard, to know that he had chattered about the girl who had wronged him so cruelly.

Miss Gregory when properly wound up did not trouble overmuch about any reply to her remarks; the principal thing was to have an audience, so she rattled on. "It makes John Standish into a hero of romance to think that anything of this sort has been happening to him. Of course, he has not said a word about the wrong that was done him. He is much too proud for anything of that sort. Indeed, if he ever thinks of the girl at all, it would only be to despise her. I heard one of the other men talking. It seems that some of them knew someone else who knew about the affair. A fearfully roundabout way of getting at things. The men look up to him so much, because they all say he is such a good sort, and he has sacrificed himself so for other people. I suppose sacrifice always does bring its own reward, although it is not the sort of thing that I should shine at."

Joan made some sort of half-incoherent answer, then rose to her feet to carry the dirty cups outside to the table under the open shed by the oven, where such washing up was mostly done. The arrangements were so

very primitive, and the lack of convenience was so great, that things had to be done in a very haphazard fashion. Joan washed the cups, then as the morning was fine and dry she left them on the draining board to dry themselves, because one had to be economical in towels in these days.

It was balm to her wounded pride to know that, after all, John Standish had not been talking of the girl who had wronged him. She had put him on a pedestal in her heart, and was inclined to a good bit of hero-worship in his direction, because of the suffering and disgrace he had had to bear through her. But of a certainty he would have tumbled off that pedestal, and she would have lost half her respect for him, if she had been forced into believing that he had whined because of the way in which his misfortunes had come.

She went to clear the other houses of things that needed washing. As she passed the shut door of Number Three house she caught her breath in a little sob. He was lying there; he was silent and unconscious; he might even pass out of life with all the mystery unexplained. Oh, it was hard to bear! But then, life was mostly made up of hard things, and all that one could do was to take the hard bits with the easy, and to bear as best one could. She did not go into Number Three house. All the unwashed things from there had been put outside the door when the day nurse went on duty. Miss Gregory said that the Sister was

in there, that she had been there for some time. The condition of most of the patients in that ward was critical, and the untrained helpers only went in when they were summoned.

The clearing up done, Miss Gregory departed to her rest. Joan was left with almost more on her hands than she could do. Backwards and forwards she went, passing from one house to the other, intent on having everything ready for the coming of the doctor. There were beds to be made, faces to be washed, and all the hundred-and-one things that fall to the lot of the underlings in hospital work. The patients assisted her labours according to their ability. Those who were getting better were cheerful for their own sakes, and because they would make things as bright as they could for those who were not making much progress. The air was full of jokes and laughter. A soldier has to make the most of what brightness comes his way, because the other side of the picture would be so very dark without these gleams of sunshine. Joan felt her spirits rising. She was able to smile at the jokes. She even bore with patience the shrill tootling of the flute that consoled the suffering of Private Briggs, who had had both legs shot away.

She was feeling happier, but she was strained and anxious still. Every sense was on the alert to catch the faintest sign of news from Number Three house. The door had been opened so rarely this morning. Half-an-

hour ago she had seen the doctor pass in. She wondered what was happening there. Had John Standish recovered enough yet to say what had happened to him and to the rest of the troop out there in the wild solitude of the marshes?

Backwards and forwards, to and fro. Would that long morning never end? It was long past the time for the doctor to make his round. Even the Sister had not paid her usual visit. Joan was feeling that she really could not bear the suspense much longer, when she saw Lady Huntly coming along the cinder path between houses One and Two.

Joan skipped over a big mud puddle, skirted a pile of buckets and pans that the orderly had failed to move out of the way, and so reached the side of Lady Huntly.

"Will you tell me, please, if Mr. Standish is any better? And is he able to speak yet?" she panted.

"The doctor says he is distinctly better, that he has much more life than when you brought him back yesterday. But he is not able to speak yet; he has not even opened his eyes. Of course we are all dreadfully anxious to know what he knows; but there is plainly nothing for it but to wait with what patience we can, until he is well enough to talk." Lady Huntly smiled kindly at Joan as she spoke; then with a nod she passed on her way, for affairs were pressing just then.

CHAPTER XIX

Joan the Champion

THE second day had worn on until nearly evening before John Standish recovered sufficiently to be able to talk, and to say what had happened to him. Colonel Guest had come over from the camp and was waiting at the hospital, and it was he who questioned John as to the plight in which they had found him, and why he was separated from the troop he had been guiding.

It is the difficulties of transport that make military operations so hard in Salonika. Where the barriers are not high mountains, they are equally impossible and impassable marshes. Impassable, that is, save to those who have wrested the secrets of the swamps, and know where ridges of firm ground may be found. John Standish had spent months in wandering to and fro, and in searching up and down, until he had made himself so familiar with the district lying wide of Lake Betchik that he could have traversed it safely in the dark. He was word-perfect in the task he had set himself, and many a troop he had conveyed safely through the tortuous ways and by the deep pools hidden away in

the reed-beds. But the misfortune that had dogged his career so long stalked after him still. It was treachery that had led to the surprise attack, when he had been wounded in the jaw. He had not recovered from that hurt yet, although he was doing his work; and now he was being broken down in a fresh way, but it was treachery still.

"Where are the troop?" Colonel Guest asked his question abruptly. The fate of that little band, led by a possible traitor, weighed on him to a serious extent.

"I don't know," answered John, and the dumb misery of his eyes made the Colonel avert his own gaze for a minute, because he instinctively shrank from the suffering he saw there. But he had his duty to do, and he did it.

"Where did you leave them, and why?" Try as he would, the Colonel could not keep the harsh note out of his voice. To him, a guide found apart from the company he was guiding showed that the guide did not know his work, or, knowing it, had not done it.

"They left me," answered the injured man, and again there was the trouble in his face. "Colonel, there is black treachery somewhere, and you don't know who you can trust. Lieutenant Frost accused me to my face of being a German spy. He declared to the men that I was leading them to betrayal and to death. He called

on them to avenge themselves, and they fell upon me as one man. It was of no use to try and protect myself; they would not hear reason when I tried to speak, and I don't remember any more."

"You say that they suspected you of being a traitor; but why?" demanded the Colonel, who looked fairly amazed at this story.

"That I don't know, sir," replied John, speaking with difficulty. He was very low down still, and the injury to his jaw rendered his talking thick and indistinct. "I was ready at the camp with the men, and waiting for you, when Lieutenant Frost came to me and said that he had your instructions to set off at once. He was very sharp and dictatorial in his manner to me, but pleasant enough to the other men. I didn't take any special notice; I have found that the younger the officer, and the less important he is, the more side he usually puts on. I had my duty to do, and I did it to my best."

"I told you to wait until I came," remarked the Colonel with a heavy frown.

"I know you did, sir; but what was I to do? The Lieutenant had come straight from the station hospital; I knew you had gone over there. He came back in the car you had used, and he brought me what looked like a straight message from you. It never entered my head that there could be anything wrong, though I did feel annoyed at being spoken to in such a way before the

men. After all, when one has a job like mine, one must have some semblance of authority over the men one guides. When I have a lot of men to take through the marshes, I can't do my work unless I have enough power over them to make them take decent care. When I gave an order the Lieutenant laughed at me, and naturally the men laughed too. I was going to take them by the short cut through the reed-beds, but I knew it was useless to attempt this unless they would do as I told them, so I asked the Lieutenant straight out what he meant by risking the men like that, for it was really risking their lives. In that short cut there are quags on either side; a step too far to the right or to the left might soon land a man in disaster from which we could not have saved him, so I did well to be careful. The Lieutenant turned on me then, and openly accused me of being a German spy. He told me he knew as much of the marshes as I did, and the way I was going to take the men would lead straight into the hands of the enemy. He called upon the men to treat a spy according to his deserts. They fell upon me then, and that is all I know about it."

The Colonel stood staring down at the bandaged figure on the cot, and wondering whether John could be in his right senses. It was unthinkable that such a story could be true. It was past belief that a troop of men should so mishandle the guide who was trying to lead them safely. Yet, if they once believed that the man was a

spy, and was making use of his knowledge for purposes of treachery, then anything might happen.

John Standish looked up into the face of the Colonel, and, reading something of this, turned his head slightly; then when he was spoken to, did not answer. He could see that he was not believed, so why trouble to make his explanations any clearer?

In vain the Colonel tried to cross-question him. John spoke never a word. The doctor was called; but he, seeing the condition of his patient, said that enough had been done for the present, and he would not be answerable for the life of the man if he were to be badgered any further just then.

Straight from the ward to the private room of his sister went Colonel Guest, and asked that Joan might be sent for. She came, after a minute or so of delay. She had been washing the faces of her patients, and her hands were still damp from soapy water, while her hair was escaping from under her cap—one piece indeed had straggled down over her shoulder. She knew she was untidy, but she also knew that it would make the Colonel angry to wait, and so she had come just as she was.

The Colonel went over with her again all that she had told him of Lieutenant Frost, and cross-questioned her sharply at every turn. He could not shake her statements, nor in any way alter her conviction. She was quite clear, and he could not hide from himself that

if she were correct, then Lieutenant Frost was about the biggest traitor to be found in the camps of the Allies that day.

He told Joan to wait where she was; and, going himself to the 'phone, had a long talk over the wire with Major White, who had just come from the camp at Strovach, to be sent on through the marshes to the outpost that was so badly in need of assistance. Then he came back to Joan, and told her bluntly enough that John Standish must plainly be off his head, and she herself the victim of a big mistake. The record of Lieutenant Rodney Frost showed him to be a scientific man who had worked in the factory of a Mr. Pringle in Manchester. He had contributed not a little valuable work and information to his particular branch of military service. Of course it was an error that he should have started across the marshes without definite instructions from the Colonel to proceed. It was human to err when it was done from excess of zeal; it was to a certain extent a pardonable offence.

"The man is a traitor!" cried Joan hotly. "Can you not see that all you have told me fits in with my story? It is very remarkable, too, that the lives of the two men should have crossed so continually. John Standish was employed in Mr. Pringle's factory, though Mrs. Pringle did not know it when she came to see us at Swanton. He was a sort of instructor, and he held the Government papers and things. It was some of these that he brought

to Swanton with him when the doctors sent him there for a holiday, because he had been working so hard. Through my carelessness and indifference those papers were stolen from him, and because they were so important, and belonged to the Government, he has had to suffer severely for the loss of them. Think how hard he has tried to make good, and still to do his best for his country in spite of unfair treatment. After he enlisted in the ranks and was sent out here, he looked about to see how he could do his duty most thoroughly; and because he has such a wonderful memory, and always knows a place again if he has seen it once, he set himself to study the marshes. He lived with the Vlachs, who were feeding sheep in the marshes during the summer, and he went the length and breadth of those fearful swamps until he could pass the most dangerous places at night without making a false step. Then he was wounded, as you know, when that surprise attack was made on a troop that he was guiding through the swamps. But though he was in hospital, and the doctors would have kept him there, directly the need for his services came he was ready to go, even though his jaw was by no means healed. Do you think that a man who was a traitor would have done that?"

The Colonel was a little carried away by Joan and her enthusiasm. He was dreadfully worried on account of the troop, and he was inclined to be sarcastic just because he could not see his way through things.

“John Standish has certainly found a warm advocate and champion in you,” he answered rather curtly. “Time will prove whether you are right—meanwhile we suspend judgment.”

“But all the same the poor man will have to suffer. The hopelessness of things will retard his getting better, and don’t you think it would be only common fairness to believe that he is loyal until treachery has been proved against him?” Joan was flushed and excited, her eyes sparkled. To her it seemed the cruellest thing in the world to be so ready to doubt the good faith of a man who had suffered so sorely by reason of what he had tried to do for his country.

“In an ordinary way it is usual to believe that a man is honest until he has been proved a rogue,” replied the Colonel. “But in the army we have to work on the assumption that every man is a traitor until he has been proved to be absolutely loyal.”

“It is not fair in this case, indeed it is not!” There were actual tears in the eyes of Joan now. She was feeling hopeless and helpless; she had an idea, too, that the Colonel was laughing at her. To be made fun of under present circumstances was surely something too dreadful to be borne. She had suffered so much, and she was feeling that things could not be much worse; but that the good faith of the stricken man should be doubted at this juncture was something quite too bad to be endured without crying out in protest.

"We have to wait as patiently as we can," said Colonel Guest; and there was nothing in his manner even to suggest that he had any desire to turn Joan into ridicule, so she had to be consoled in spite of herself.

It was three days later before the Colonel came over to the hospital again. Meanwhile nothing had been heard of the missing troop. One of the patrols had returned owing to disasters among the men, but they had come on no trace of the company led by Lieutenant Frost. The outpost which had been in difficulties had been reached by a longer route, and had been relieved just in time. A terrific onslaught had been made upon it, but the attack was not launched until the reinforcements were safely there. When the news was brought that the outpost was still in the hands of the Allies, those in authority at the camp began to breathe more freely. If that had been lost, then indeed the treachery in their midst would have been of a serious character. As it was, they hoped that no great harm had been done, although the loss of the little troop would of course be a grave matter.

Several more of the officers had been over from the camp to see John Standish at the hospital. He was still very ill. The doctors only allowed him to be seen under protest; but as so much was at stake they had to content themselves with protesting, and leave it there. To all questions the sick man answered that

he had told what he knew, and he could say no more. So they were not much the wiser anyway.

Then on the third day along came the Colonel, and, as ill-fortune would have it, his car broke down just as he reached the hospital, and could go no farther, despite the frantic efforts of the chauffeur. The Colonel was due to meet one of the road-making contingents at a point about twenty miles away across the marshes, by what was known as the summer road. Unless he could get there to time, the contingent would not be able to proceed, and much of the transport business on that side of the lake would be thrown into confusion.

Finding matters hopeless so far as the car was concerned, and remembering Joan's valuable assistance and good driving on previous occasions, the Colonel went in search of his sister, and demanded the loan of Joan as driver again.

"Do you think she is fit for it, dear?" asked Lady Huntly with an anxious note in her voice. "We are very worried about her. She has not recovered from that fearful night out on the marshes, and it is easy to see that she is fretting about the mystery of the missing men. She seems to think herself responsible for the misfortunes which have come upon John Standish, and, although she is very brave and quiet about it all, we can see how it is wearing her."

"All the more reason that she should have some-

thing to distract her mind," replied the Colonel in a rather unsympathetic fashion. "If a girl gets hipped and nervous from too much work, you just shut her up indoors, and feed her on tea, when what she really wants is plenty of outdoor exercise. Please tell her to get ready at once. If I am not at the Black Pool in an hour's time, fifty men will be standing twiddling their thumbs, while five hundred other men will have to go on short rations to-morrow if we can't get the lorries through to them with food. There are plenty of hard things to be borne, and we need not add to the list by making the men go hungry in this weather."

Lady Huntly said no more, but went away to tell the Sister that Nurse Joan must be spared. They had to call her Nurse Joan, despite the fact that she was such a beginner; and indeed she was quite as deserving of the title as some of the three months probationers.

Five minutes to slip out of her cotton frock, and into garb more suitable for driving, then Joan was out at the shed overhauling the motor-cycle, with the help of Staff-Sergeant Brown and the Colonel's chauffeur. The last named was an expert mechanician, and he gave valuable assistance in getting the cycle into good running order. In ten minutes they were away, rushing along the wide green track known as the summer road. This particular way had got its name from the

fact that it was the route the Vlachs of the district always took in the summer when they went with their flocks into the heart of the marsh country, and it was said to run in a straight line for fifty miles. Being grass all the way, it was a fearfully hard road to ride, the bumping was shocking; but Joan had proved her mettle before, and it was not a bumpy road that would upset her driving all the time her engine ran smoothly.

It was good to be speeding along, steering a straight course in spite of obstacles. Somehow, the concentration needed for her work lifted the sense of intolerable strain from her, and she was glad to forget her cares for a time.

They reached the Black Pool ten minutes before the Colonel was due there, and Joan had a brief resting-spell while her passenger went to oversee the work of the road-making contingent. The men were toiling in the thick black mud of the swamps, as hard and discouraging work as could be imagined. But they were bringing order out of chaos; and half a mile more of digging, delving, and planting of small trees, bits of broken wagons, and such-like things, would result in a track firm enough to bear up a motor lorry; then the food transport service could go on without interruption, and the hungry men, toiling miles farther ahead, would not have to add semi-starvation to their other trials.

Presently the Colonel came back to Joan. "I want to be taken round the head of the lake by a track that goes through the reed-beds. Here is a map that Standish made for the use of the camp when he was first out in the marshes. Just study the route, will you, while I go across to Major Norton? When I come back I shall be ready to start at once, and I don't want to be kept waiting."

Joan took the map which the Colonel had given her and bent her energies on it. She had to travel on the thin red line running in and out among the reed-beds. Much of the ground was frozen now, for winter held a strong grip on the Betchik marshes. It was the frozen ground that would give her her best chance. She could drive over quags that would be impassable under warmer conditions. She had done a good deal of marsh travelling now, and she told herself that nothing could very well be worse than the ridge between the two parts of the lake across which she had driven the Colonel, when they found John Standish lying bruised, battered, and unconscious.

The Colonel came back, and mounted to his place in the side-car. Joan got her engine running, and started to find her way round the end of the lake, which at this part made a deep bay hedged with forests of tall-growing reeds. A solitary country she supposed it to be, such as all the marsh district was in winter. Sometimes on the way to the Black Pool she had seen a

deserted hut, or perhaps a couple of them, but she had seen no sign of human habitation; so her surprise rose to sheer astonishment when, as she turned away from the lake into an avenue between overarching reeds, a miserably-clad woman ran out of a little hut, and cried shrilly to her to stop.

"Shall I stop?" asked Joan of the Colonel, putting her brakes on gently, for she had been running at good speed, and did not want to have trouble with her engine.

"Yes, stop," answered the Colonel. He had turned his head, and seen that the woman was running after them along the track, crying out in shrill beseeching tones for aid.

Joan stopped, and, jumping from her seat, went to meet the woman by way of satisfying her, until the Colonel, who was slower in his movements, could unpack himself from the side-car to see what was wanted.

The woman, who appeared to be in great distress, took Joan by the hand, and by motions besought her to return with her to the house that was standing among the reeds.

Looking back, and seeing that the Colonel was quite close behind, Joan went with the woman without any hesitation, and followed her into the crazy hut, where a fire of reeds smouldered on the ground, the smoke escaping through a hole in the roof. Two men lay on the

ground near the fire; the first was a native like the woman, probably her husband. The other was dressed in khaki, and at sight of his face a sharp cry escaped Joan, for pinched, pale, and dirty though he was, at the first glance she recognized him as Lieutenant Rodney Frost.

CHAPTER XX

The Mystery Cleared

"I AM here." It was the quiet voice of the Colonel close behind that gave Joan back her courage, and she turned to him, clutching at his arm in her excitement.

"It is Lieutenant Frost, and I thought he was dead," she said by way of explaining her agitation.

"Frost, and here?" The Colonel pushed past Joan, and knelt down by the heap of reeds whereon lay Lieutenant Frost—a sorry bed it was—and the man looked as if he were dying of starvation.

"Food, give me food, or spirit!" exclaimed the man, who had opened his eyes and looked at the Colonel, yet without recognition.

Colonel Guest gave him a drink from the flask he carried in his pocket; then went over to the other man, who, however, was past taking anything, and seemed to be slowly slipping out of life. Then he came back to the Lieutenant and asked sternly: "Where are the men you took with you?"

"I don't know," said Frost, and Joan saw the terror

leap to his eyes as he looked at her. So he had recognized her, and it was the knowledge that she was there at Lady Huntly's hospital which had made him beat such a hasty retreat.

The Colonel pulled out his revolver. "I want the truth from you about this business; so speak, and quickly! By the look of you, I should say that you are a pretty sick man; but, sick or well, you have got to tell me what I want to know. Did you set the men on to batter John Standish, in order that he might die, and you escape the fate you so richly deserved?"

Joan stood staring at the Colonel as if she were under a spell. In her own mind, she felt quite sure that he would shoot the man lying on the reeds unless Frost would speak; and, if this really happened, how would she have the courage to bear it?

But the man lying on the reeds had the craven spirit that shrinks from nothing so much as physical pain. It was in his mind that, if the Colonel shot, it would not be to kill, only to wound. Frost knew he had no courage to bear more pain, so he put up his hand in weak entreaty to the other to forbear.

"Give me a chance and I will tell you all," he gasped; and by the look of him the Colonel judged that he was nearly in extremity.

"Say on then, and be quick about it." As he spoke, Colonel Guest drew a notebook from his pocket and thrust it into the hand of Joan, with a brief word of



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"I WANT THE TRUTH FROM YOU ABOUT THIS BUSINESS"

command to her. "Take down what he says. Write as fast as you can; I think there is not much time."

Joan nodded in understanding; then watched in silence while the Colonel administered more spirit to the sick man, in order to whip his failing energies into sufficient vigour for confession.

For a few minutes Lieutenant Frost lay and gasped as if he were dying. Cold shivers crept over Joan then, for, if he died without confession, John Standish might never be cleared. Presently he seemed to revive, and, at a nod from the Colonel, Joan opened her book and prepared to write.

"I am German by birth," began the man lying on the bed of reeds, and there was a malicious gleam in his sunken eyes as he spoke, for well he knew how the statement would upset the Colonel, and, for himself, intuition told him that he was almost out of reach of any earthly vengeance. "When the war broke out, I was told I could serve my country best by taking an English name and learning all I could of munition supplies, especially as regarded the small private factories that were springing up in every direction. From being Rudolf Froebel I became Robert Forbes, and I got work in Mr. Pringle's factory in Manchester. I found that it would take me months to work into a confidential position; and I was going to throw up the post in disgust, when I chanced to hear that one of the most trusted of their scientific workers, a man named John Standish,

had broken down in health, and had been ordered to the seaside for a change. From talk in the workshops, I gathered that it would pay me to chuck my job and follow this man. I went to Swanton in pursuit of him, and for three or four weeks I watched for a chance to get at his papers, for I had found out that he was in possession of a valuable lot of information. All my efforts proved vain. I tried to get acquainted with him, but he had no use for acquaintances, being a model of prudence and discretion—a young man, in fact, who was as good as they make them. Then I resolved on a daring move. I had learned a good many of his ways by dint of careful watching, and I found that he spent hours walking and studying in the Durling undercliff. I also went to the Durling undercliff, but I was provided with a useful crowbar made to look like a walking-stick. Seizing a suitable moment, I levered a great mass of rock down upon him, and then watched to see the effect. He was buried under the debris safely enough; and my course would have been easy, for he would certainly have been dead in half an hour, when along comes a meddling slip of a girl, and starts digging him out with furious energy. Give me some more of that stuff, please; I am sinking through the bed."

Colonel Guest leaned over the man, and administered another dose of the spirit. Much he wondered whether the man would rally sufficiently to finish his confession;

but he could not hurry or trouble anyone who was so near to death as this German spy in English khaki. A few minutes the man lay gasping, and then he began to speak again, while Joan's pencil moved rapidly, and she never lifted her eyes from the book in which she wrote.

“The girl managed to attract notice, and sent for help. I could not stir to go for what I wanted, until I knew where they were going to take my quarry. When I found that they were bound for a big house close by, that had been taken for the summer by a Mr. Haysome, I guessed I had better make tracks for what I wanted. To my dismay, I found that I had to go to my lodgings and get into fresh clothes, for I had managed to slit my garments, and to get them so smothered in chalk dust that I had need to be wary if I did not want to get caught. The changing took time; then I went to the place where John Standish was lodging, and saying that I was a friend of Mr. Standish, who had been badly hurt, and had been carried to the house of Mr. Haysome, I managed to get access to the papers I wanted. It took time to sort and pack them. I had only just got clear of the house, when I met the girl who had been digging Standish out from under the landslide. I guessed it would not do for me to show myself on the rail that day, so I went back to my lodgings, told my landlady that I had been wired for, as my mother was ill, then sending my baggage off by train, I went

for a joy-ride in a motor, for I guessed that would be the last place that the police would look for a man who had been stealing valuable papers.

"I stayed a few days at Weygate, then took an evening train to town. We were drawing into a junction where the Swanton trains put down passengers, when another train passed us at a very slow rate, and I saw the girl, whom I had discovered to be Mr. Haysome's daughter, staring at me from the window of one of its carriages. There was recognition in her face, and a determination to run me down, so when my train pulled in at the junction I just got out, mixed with the crowd, and passed the man at the barrier without giving up my ticket. Most of the information which I had got from Standish I sold to my Government, but I kept enough to enable me to work up and pose as an expert in gas-making and -distributing. I applied for a commission, and managed to get it—of course under the name Rodney Frost. By a very strange chance, the very first place at which I was billeted was the house of Mr. Pringle. There I fell in love with his daughter Nancy, and we should have been married by this time if it had not been for the prudent streak in the old man, which would not let him give his consent to a hasty wedding. The regiment was sent to Salonika, and while most of it remained at the base, I was sent to the Ludavac Camp, and from there was in constant communication with German agents. Then I came over to

your little outpost camp, Colonel Guest; and when you were talking to me about the spy troubles I was laughing in my sleeve, and wondering what you would think if you knew all. We had a long talk, as you may remember, on scientific matters, and in the end I left some notes with you, only to remember, when too late, that some of these were in the handwriting of John Standish. I was coming away from that interview when I passed a girl in V.A.D. uniform who was waiting to speak to you. Her face seemed familiar, but try as I would I could not place her. Then, soon after, I came to the camp again, and was told that you had gone over to the hospital, and might be detained there. It had come to me that I must get those notes from you without delay, so I followed you over, though I had to do the journey on a push-cycle. When I got there you had not arrived, having gone round by a longer route.

“I was walking up and down in front of the hospital houses when I suddenly encountered the same girl, and this time I knew her at once as Miss Haysome. What was more to the point, I saw that she knew me, and I realized that it was only a matter of moments, perhaps, before she denounced me for what I was. Then your car came up. You got out with Lady Huntly, and went into one of the houses; and I went to the chauffeur, ordering him to drive me back to camp without a moment's delay. There was time, I thought, if only I had

sufficient daring, to pull off one piece of treachery to which I stood pledged, and that was to give the rescue troop into the hands of my own people. It was the irony of fate that the guide should be John Standish—the irony of fate for him, I mean, because I was able to dispose of him by denouncing him as a spy. Then the men did the rest, and we left him lying dead in the reed-beds. We lost our way after that, and I lost the others. I had hurt my foot, and could only crawl; for days I crawled, and gnawed at the shoots of the reeds to keep life in me. I fell into a pool, and a countryman coming along, pulled me out at the risk of his life, and brought me here; but he is very ill, and I should say it is a toss-up which of us snuffs out first. Now, Colonel Guest, what about your cleverness in detecting spies in the camp? Rather bowled over, don't you feel? Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

The man's laughter was the most horrible sound that Joan had ever heard, and when it died away in choked gasps, the Colonel took her by the shoulders and thrust her gently but firmly outside the door.

"He has gone. Get a breath of fresh air." It was only when the Colonel spoke to her that Joan realized how spent she was, and that she was trembling so that she could scarcely stand.

It was nearly a week later when the men of the missing troop had been found stranded, and almost starved, in the marshes, that John Standish, who had been moved

into a room by himself, sent to ask that Joan would come and speak to him.

In fear and trembling Joan went. What could he have to say to her that she would care to hear? Oh, she was sick of Salonika and the hard life! She had done what she could. Now she would ask Lady Huntly to let her go back to England, so that she might be away even from the memory of her pain and humiliation.

John Standish was getting better. There was hope in his eyes, and a new energy in his bearing that took away much of his apparent weakness.

He stretched out both hands as Joan came into the room, and his words were straight to the point. "I want you to forgive me. Will you? I have behaved very badly to you. I held you responsible for all the trouble that had come to me, and I was the harder on you, because I loved you for the brave effort you had made to save my life."

"You ask my forgiveness?" Joan cried in amazement. "Why, it is I who have to ask for yours, because it was my fault, my carelessness, and indifference that led to the trouble at first. But words won't express how I have felt about it."

"The past is past," he said, getting hold of her hands and holding them in a tight grip. "Joan, I have been hearing about what you have done for me. I am only a poor man, dear; but now that my name is cleared, I can say to you that I love you, and, if you can only love

me in return, there will be nothing too hard for me in my upward climb."

Joan bowed her head on their clasped hands. "I do love you," she murmured. She was always truthful, however much she might have blundered in the past. "But I have brought you so much trouble that I wonder you care for me at all."

"We should not appreciate the silver linings if we did not have the clouds first," he said gently. "It is worth all that we have had to go through, just to find each other at the end. Joan, however much you boggled things at the first, you have made good since."



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